

THIS JESUS

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THIS JESUS

*Towards a Clearer Understanding of
the Significance of Jesus Christ
A Non-technical Approach*

ERIC G. FROST

B.A., B.D.



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TO
MY WIFE

*whose companionship has been
for me
an avenue to Christ*

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Preface

'FINDING Christ' is a phrase frequently used for describing the life-transforming experience of the Christian, and a very apt one it is; but we might equally well say it means 'being found by Christ'. For a real Christian experience comes through the meeting of our souls with Christ, not just a brief encounter, but the coming alive of a lasting relationship, personal and unique—personal because He is ours, unique because He is who He is.

Jesus, it follows, is the very centre of our new life, and if He is to continue to mean everything to us we must get to know Him as well as we can. Primarily, our knowledge of Him grows through fellowship with Him, through the discovery of faith, prayer and the shared life; but if Jesus Christ is to be to us all we claim, we are bound to seek as intelligent a view of Him as we can attain. This means studying Him with a view to assessing who He really is and where He stands in our life and the world's.

This book makes no pretensions to being a complete Christology. It is not a systematic work in the sense of attempting an exhaustive biblical and historical survey. It has not been possible to touch more than lightly upon some of the great issues one is bound to meet in the course of such an exploration, else this slender volume would have grown forbiddingly in size. There is, of course, a wealth of literature available to those who wish to pursue these matters farther. The author's aim, much more modest, has been to introduce to plain people a more thoughtful, better informed, view of the Person of Jesus Christ and to deepen their appreciation of the wonder and glory of the Incarnation.

THIS JESUS

One of the statements issued by the Evanston Assembly of the World Council of Churches is: 'Theology is not for clergy only; it must be accessible to lay people in a form which they recognize as relevant and essential to their proper task'. It is in this conviction that the author has written this book.

It remains to me now to perform a pleasurable duty—that of expressing my gratitude to those who, in the midst of their extremely busy lives, have spared the time to read my manuscript, make corrections, give encouragement and add their valuable suggestions: my colleague, the REV. HARRY JOHNSON, MTH, my brother, the REV. STANLEY B. FROST, MTH, PHD, Dean of the Faculty of Divinity, M'Gill University, Montreal, and the REV. PERCY SCOTT, BD, D THEOL, Tutor at Hartley Victoria College, Manchester, valued friend since college days. To the last mentioned I am also indebted for the Foreword he readily contributed to this book. I am grateful, too, for improvements suggested by the REV. J. ALAN KAY, MA PHD, in the course of his skilled editing of my manuscript.

ERIC G. FROST

CHAPEL ALLERTON, LEEDS

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	7
<i>Foreword</i>	13
I. 'STRONG SON OF GOD'—OUR LORD'S DIVINE NATURE	17
i. <i>The Faith Handed Down</i>	17
1. The Church's Confession	17
2. The Magnitude of the Christian Claim	17
3. The Church's Searching Examination of other Views	20
ii. <i>'Who is This Jesus?' A Vital Question Today</i>	22
1. Its Bearing upon this Stage of History	22
2. The Meaning of the Incarnation for the Individual	24
3. The Central Fact of Our Faith	27
4. Unitarianism	28
5. A Heartfelt Doctrine	29
iii. <i>Why the Incarnation?</i>	30
1. In Jesus God Came Down	30
2. God is Alone Adequate to Cope with Our Need	30
3. Jesus Makes God Known to Us	32
4. He Reconciles Men to God	33
5. He Makes Man's Response to God's Love	33
iv. <i>Did Jesus Realize that He was the Son of God?</i>	34
1. How the Problem Presents Itself	34
2. Our Evidence Fragmentary and Indirect	35
3. Three Differing Views	35

THIS JESUS

v. <i>The Evidence of Christ's Divinity</i>	37
1. What Kind of Evidence are We Seeking?	37
2. The Disciples Convinced, despite Tradition	38
3. Jesus' Former Companions became His Worshippers	39
4. The Testimony of Modern Times	41
5. His Power to Cope with Our Need	42
6. His Power to Keep	43
7. Apparent in His Church	45
8. And in a Wider Circle	46
II. 'JESUS IS OUR BROTHER NOW'	49
i. <i>Our Lord's True Humanity</i>	49
1. The Extent of the Christian Claim	49
2. That Jesus Lived is not in Doubt	50
3. A Claim too Extreme for Some Minds	51
4. The Humanity of Jesus is Complete	53
5. The Presentation of the Gospels	56
6. The Witness of the Early Church	59
ii. <i>Questions raised for the Modern Mind</i>	60
1. In the Light of Modern Discoveries con- cerning Man	60
2. The Virgin Birth	62
iii. <i>The Vital Importance of the Reality of Christ's Humanity</i>	66
1. We must hold on to Christ as Our True Kinsman	66
2. Sharer of our Common Life	70
3. God Expressed in Full Measure through Christ's Perfect Humanity	73
4. Necessary to Christ's Saviourhood	74
5. A Human Saviour for a Personal Redemp- tion	76

CONTENTS

III. CRUCIFIED, RISEN, REIGNING	80
i. <i>The Atonement</i>	80
1. Jesus Christ cannot be Understood Apart from His Cross	80
2. Christ's Life and Death a Single Whole	80
3. Sub-moral Interpretations of the Atonement Repudiated	81
4. Terms that have Their Value—and Limits	83
5. 'He Came Down and Died'	84
6. 'He Died that We might be Forgiven'	86
7. He Died to Restore Man to God	89
8. The Change is wrought in Man—not in God	90
ii. <i>The Resurrection</i>	91
1. Fact or Legend?	91
2. Difficulties Presented by the Resurrection Story	94
3. Why Jesus Returned to His Disciples	97
iii. <i>'The Crownèd Lord of All'</i>	103
1. The Ascension in the Light of Modern Knowledge	103
2. The Meaning of the Ascension	106
3. Our Lord's Place in History	109
4. The End in View	111
5. 'The Son of Man'	114
6. 'Follow Me!'	117
<i>Epilogue</i>	122
<i>Questionnaire for Private or Group Study</i>	126
<i>Index</i>	131

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, to know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

I JOHN 5²⁰ (RSV)

Unless the foundations are deeply and truly laid, Evangelism will prove a vain and sentimental enterprise. It is soundly based only if we know who Christ is and what He has done for man's salvation.

DR VINCENT TAYLOR

Dear Lord,

For these three things we pray:

To see Thee more clearly,

To love Thee more dearly,

To follow Thee more nearly,

Day by day.

ST RICHARD

CHAPTER I

'Strong Son of God'

I. THE FAITH HANDED DOWN

(1) *The Church's Confession*

AFTER three centuries, the latter part of which was packed with intense debate, the Church summed up her view of Jesus in these deliberate and carefully chosen words:

'I believe . . . in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, Begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God, Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father; By whom all things were made, Who for us men, and for our salvation came down from heaven, And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, And was made man, And was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried, And the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures, And ascended into heaven, And sitteth on the right hand of the Father. And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead: Whose kingdom shall know no end.'¹

(2) *The magnitude of the Christian claim*

Jesus, this Creed asserts, is none other than the Eternal Son of God, who exchanged the glory of His Father's Throne for our sin-ridden environment. He shared our human lot, even to the point of dying the lingering,

¹ The Nicene Creed as we know it probably contains some later modifications, but it is substantially that adopted at the Council of Nicea, A.D. 325.

agonizing death of crucifixion—and all this for our salvation! This work achieved, He resumed the glory from which He will eventually come again, the Judge of men.

What a tremendous claim! Yet we make that, all that and nothing less, for Jesus. If He is all that our Creeds say, and if He has gone to the lengths stated in their confession, then He has the right to our utmost devotion, He deserves all the love our hearts can render, and more. It is a breath-taking claim that in Jesus we have,

*The Lord of hosts, the God most high,
Who quits His throne on earth to live.*

Jesus stands at the very heart of our faith, because we recognize Him as no one less than the Son of God in human form.

Since accepting the Christian faith involves making the Church's claim our own, we must try to get as clear an understanding as we can of what is implied in the statement that in Jesus 'Very God' became man. When we say that our aim is to get a clear understanding of the Christian Creed, we do not expect the truth to become so obvious that we shall be able to take it in our stride. Or, to change the metaphor, we cannot enter into the fullness of the truth merely by paddling in the shallows; we shall sometimes find ourselves out of our depth, but that need not unnerve us. It is a poor Christian who always wants to feel the familiar ground beneath his feet.

There is a sense in which the phenomenon of God-becoming-man is so stupendous that it will always defy our intelligence. Our mental powers stop far short of the wonder of God and His surpassing wisdom. He is Ineffable Love. Some people say that we must come to this subject with the frank acknowledgement at the outset that the statement 'this man is God' is sheer paradox; by all human

reasoning it is as illogical to assert 'God is man' as to say 'light is dark'. Certainly it is true that the inquirer who looks to theology to *explain* the wonder of the Incarnation is expecting more from it than it can do. God and His ways are not to be explained; if they were, He would not be God. But the Good News of the Gospel enters at this very point: it is the proclamation that God has disclosed Himself in Jesus Christ. 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us . . . full of grace and truth' (John 1¹⁴). 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father' (John 14⁹). So, argue some of our foremost contemporary theologians, we are not to look upon the unfathomable nature of this mystery, the Incarnation,² as a bolt that locks the door of our understanding, but as the key that opens it.

In the 'high priestly prayer' of Jesus the Master prays: 'Father, glorify thou me in thy own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made' (John 17⁵, *RSV*). The Christian view of Jesus confesses nothing less than that He shared the glory of God before the days of His mortal flesh, that He was and is, the eternal Son. Now as we picture Jesus of Nazareth rubbing shoulders with his fellow men, brought up with brothers and sisters in a large family, known to his fellow villagers as the son of Mary and Joseph, a carpenter (Mark 6³, John 6⁴²), and living a quite normal life in comparative obscurity until, in his thirtieth year, he embarked upon his mission, it comes home to us that the claim that this human personality is *God* moving among men is amazing in the extreme. If your mind hesitates to accept this estimate of Jesus, it is no wonder, for it asks a great deal of any mind. Only do not imagine that the Church had not its eyes wide open in reaching her conclusion. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, she submitted this doctrine to the most

² The term 'Incarnation' refers to the act of God in taking to Himself our humanity, 'clothing Himself with our flesh'.

searching and penetrating investigation for at least three centuries before, in the most carefully chosen words, she framed her confession. Very deliberately she then acknowledged Jesus to be, 'the only-begotten Son of God, Begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God,'³ Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father'.

(3) *The Church's searching examination of other views*

Before finally arriving at this Creed, the Church listened to every point of view. A lot lies behind those strange phrases, 'Very God of very God' and 'of one substance with the Father'. Here we shall have to dive rather deeply, but take heart, we shall come to the surface again presently. During the period of the Creed's shaping, this claim—that Jesus was none other than Very God come down from heaven—proved too much for some minds. Early in Christian history *Adoptionism* emerged. According to this theory Jesus was simply a man upon whom 'divinity' descended. A heavenly '*dunamis*'⁴ took possession of him.

The most outstanding challenger of a thoroughgoing doctrine of our Lord's eternal Deity was Arius, a presbyter (i.e. parish priest) of Alexandria, 'a tall, grave, ascetic man, whose solemn face and severe manner had made him much respected, especially by the fairer portion of the community'.⁵ That he was a man of real piety, learning and ability is generally acknowledged, but all this makes the more puzzling his campaign for a shallow theology. Still more depressing are the low tactics adopted by his party to gain its ends. Usually it is assumed that

³ Or, as the great Christmas hymn renders it, 'True God of True God'—Jesus is *truly* God.

⁴ The Greek word from which 'dynamic' is derived.

⁵ F. J. Foakes Jackson, *History of the Christian Church* (Deighton, Bell, 1942), p. 298.

pride was at the root of this conduct. It may have been; or perhaps Arius was over-hasty in his desire to produce a ‘simple gospel’. One must always be on one’s guard against easy solutions to profound problems. Their usual result is not so much a ‘simple gospel’ as a gospel for simpletons.

There was in the fourth century a great attraction in a system that outflanked the difficulty of ‘placing’ Jesus Christ by conceding no more than that He was *like* God in substance. At first sight this contention may seem to grant all that is necessary, especially as Arius was prepared to acknowledge that Christ was the Son created, at some distant time before the world was, ‘out of nothing’. But he had a reason for rejecting the statement that Christ was ‘of the *same* substance with the Father’, and it was this: he maintained that since God is an indivisible Unity, it is impossible that one should come forth out of Him.

There lies the crux of the matter. Arius insisted that the Son did not derive from the divine substance; He came ‘out of nothing’, and there was ‘a time when He was not’. Arius completes his distorted portrait of Christ when, inevitably, he goes on to declare that the Son is in all things unlike the Father, that He does not know the Father perfectly and that possibly He sinned. Athanasius, his Bishop, recognized that everything was at stake in this contention. Its representation of ‘the Son’ and ‘the Logos’ as demigods reduced Christianity to polytheism. It did not teach that God Himself had come over into our life to repair the broken fellowship, and so it left the gulf between God and man unbridged. Hence, Athanasius stood unyieldingly for a thoroughgoing view of our Lord’s eternal Deity. He was not ‘made like’ the Father ‘out of nothing’; He was ‘Begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very

God, *Begotten, not made, Being of one Substance with the Father*'.⁶

II. 'WHO IS THIS JESUS?' A VITAL QUESTION
TODAY

(1) *Its bearing upon this stage of history*

'All this is very interesting,' the modern reader may impatiently react, 'interesting, that is to say, for antiquarians, the people fond of delving into the past. But why bother us with it—us practical people who have our own situation to face, rife with up-to-date problems? Here we are confronted with hydrogen bombs, with the "clash of colour", with political rivalries that might at any moment send up our world in flames—and you ask us to occupy ourselves with minute details about the personality of Jesus!'

On the face of it this subject may seem a remote one, but when we get beneath the surface of our problems we see that it bears very definitely upon the life of our modern world. When a leading statesman like President Eisenhower, who is certainly not unversed in the possibilities of military strength or of political strategy, announces that 'schools and churches have become the true mobilization centres of the forces which might now save civilization', we are reminded that religion bears very much upon our modern situation. When, after twenty years of research, so eminent an authority as Professor Toynbee, second-to-none historian of our day, concludes that man's future lies, not in the hope of his becoming 'civilized', but in the saving power of his religion, we must see that the study of our religion is not a diversion from our primary task of saving the world, but is 'right on the nail'.

⁶ Some of this actual phrasing is later than Athanasius, but it expounds his position.

It is factors such as international tension, racial unrest, the unleashing of awful destructive power, that are, as the last paragraph illustrates, the very things forcing thinking people to realize today that modern man is incapable of handling his own situation alone. The condition of the world is so critical that man's one hope is 'power from above'. This is the point Professor Cyril Joad reached before he died. In the middle period of his life he had pinned his hope to the finest thought of the best minds in every age, believing that this wisdom would bring men to see the sense of right behaviour and to intelligent political planning. Things did not work out that way, however, and Joad saw why. Our problem was not merely ignorance, but evil—evil that would not stop even at the unspeakable horrors of concentration camps and gas chambers. Already the atom bomb was casting its shadow over civilization. Joad frankly acknowledged the situation to be more 'than we can bear if we have nothing more to rely on' than human wisdom and morality. To face evil and overcome it is, he declared, 'impossible unless I am assisted from without'.⁷ The very pressure of events caused Joad to return to the faith of his fathers, to look again to the grace of God. Just because the Incarnation is, as we shall presently see, the supreme act of God's grace, it is a matter of vital concern to anyone alive to the problems of the modern world.

Professor C. A. Coulson, in the penetrating address, *Nuclear Knowledge and Christian Responsibility*,⁸ that stirred a far wider audience than the World Methodist Council to which it was delivered in September 1956, emphasized repeatedly the relevance of the doctrine of the Incarnation to the major issue of our times. In one place, for example,

⁷ *God and Evil* (Faber).

⁸ Published as a pamphlet. See also Professor Coulson's *Some Problems of the Atomic Age* (both Epworth Press).

he declared: 'One conclusion seems to me quite inescapable. If we believe that it is God's will that His children everywhere should enjoy the benefits of civilization, then we are committed to a fair and reasonable distribution of atomic energy. There are those who argue that God is not concerned with these things. I shall reply that a pie-in-the-sky attitude of that kind weakens the Christian life in its struggle for goodness, and does despite to God's beneficence in making a richer life possible for all men. It is a denial of the worthwhileness and the significance of the material order. It fails to do justice to the real meaning of the Incarnation. Christians more than all others must be involved in these matters if they are to be truly Christian.'

In the course of this address the lecturer called attention to yet another significant aspect of the Incarnation: by becoming man God was saying something about this material world, about its place in His over-all design, its purpose for His eternal scheme. This terrestrial order has divine meaning. Since this is so, the policy of grabbing and exploiting selfishly the wealth of creation must be an affront to God. It is rebellion against His loving will which is that the whole human family should benefit from the riches contained in the earth. If any nation, or group of nations, were to attempt to monopolize the fruits of nuclear discovery, their policy would stand condemned as sheer sin. It would also be fraught with perilous consequences. In the light of such considerations, surely the 'practical' character of the doctrine of the Incarnation becomes so luminous that even the most dim sighted must see its direct bearing upon the modern scene.

(2) *The meaning of the Incarnation for the Individual*

At the beginning of the nineteenth century our fathers travelled at much the same speed as the citizens of ancient

Rome and by the same means—horse-drawn vehicles. A Member of Parliament in the early eighteen hundreds said in ridicule of the projected railroads: 'If a man were to undertake to convey us regularly to Edinburgh in coaches in seven days and bring us back in seven more, should we not vote him to Bedlam?' The rate of advance in the last fifty years is unparalleled in history. Nowadays, a passenger 'turning in' as the air-liner leaves London expects to have breakfast in New York. Our jet aircraft actually exceed the speed of sound. The speed-up of transport affords but one example, that could be many times multiplied, of the incredible progress man has made in the realm of invention and discovery in modern times.

It is little wonder that twentieth-century man has come to assume that in every way he is more advanced than his ancestors. He has to be convinced that spiritually he is on a level with the 'barbarian' for whom St Paul was concerned in his day—in short, that by God's standards he is just a needy sinner. However unpalatable, that is the blunt truth. A little reflection will reveal that we average people have little reason for feeling superior; our claim rests upon the mere accident of having been born in this particular age. Most of us have little share in the technical achievement of shooting through the sound barrier; all we can do is stand and gape. But even if we had, that would not alter our standing with God. Man cannot rise to the full stature of spirit by scientific brilliance; that will be attained only when he 'finds' himself in life with God.

We cannot begin to understand the profound meaning of the Incarnation for ourselves personally until we see two things: first, what God has in mind for us, and secondly, the realism of sin. God's grand design is to raise from human material sons and daughters to Himself ('to bring many sons to glory', Hebrews 2¹⁰). His aim is to make us into the kind of personalities who are capable

of sharing His life, glorifying and enjoying Him for ever. We cannot imagine the scale of this life's blessedness and grandeur; but it is such that St Paul, who drank very deeply of earth's bitterness, declared that 'the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us-ward' (Romans 8¹⁸). We can experience the beginnings of this new life here, but in that 'ampler sphere' it will open out into a range and quality we can only guess at now. We must hold God's intention for us steadily in view.

Then, we must be realistic about *sin*, see it as a *fact*—indeed, but for the grace of God, the conclusive fact of life. We must see sin for what it is—rebellion against God. Sin may be a momentary attitude of disloyalty (like the temporary treachery of a 'spur of the moment' betrayal); or it may be the persistent defiance of one who has joined the rebel ranks. Either way, sin is rebellion against God, hindering His purpose of Holy Love. We must not regard it as we often do a child's 'naughtiness', making light of it, even smiling behind the wrongdoer's back, whatever correction we may make to his face. Sin is lethal—a deadly, soul-destroying reality. This has not to be argued; it is there for all to see—not least when we look into our own hearts. Again, however inexplicable to us, it remains a fact that we were born into a sinful race, were infected by sin from the beginning and live in a sin-ridden environment. This fact glares from our newspapers; and behind the 'newsy' sins that find their way into those columns, there lies that mass of human sin too normal and respectable to be of interest to readers. Not that we can blame the race for our sin. It was truly said by an ancient writer: 'Each man has become the Adam of his own soul.' We are guilty of our own wilful sin.

You and I personally are too deeply involved in this thing to be able to throw it off and make ourselves at

home with God. Our souls would shrink from His Holy Love, just as a subterranean creature shrinks from the light of day, if He did not stoop down to us. If we are to be reconciled to God, brought back into the relationship of love with Him, the first move, the great act of grace, must come from Him. It is against this dark background of sin that the Incarnation shines with all its radiant meaning.

*A Saviour born, in love supreme
He comes our fallen souls to raise;
He comes His people to redeem
With all His plenitude of grace.*

(3) *The central fact of our faith*

From the beginning the Church has clearly seen this: that religion to be a power must be a *faith*. It is indeed a philosophy, but not just a philosophy; that is to say, it is not merely a clever piece of detective work which unravels life's secrets. It is vitally concerned with ethics, but it does not halt at working out the ideal code of conduct. Religion is not content, even, with being able to trace life to its Source; it aims at nothing less than bringing man into life-giving relationship with the Giver of Life.

Man's own little cable could never have reached the Divine Source of Life. This is where the Good News of Christianity comes in; God has thrown out the cable from His side, or to speak in real personal terms, God has come down to us in Person. This is the supreme truth upon which everything else hinges, and the Creeds have been designed to preserve it. If Arius had been right, we should still have been without this Good News, and the possibility of life-relationship with God would still be beyond us. Only God could make this possible. So great is the separative power of sin, that the gulf it has created between God and man could be bridged only at infinite cost—the

sacrifice that began when the Very Son of God 'left His Father's throne on high' to be born in a stable. If we yield up this truth, the very essence of our religion becomes changed; a prophet we should have, but not a Saviour.

(4) *Unitarianism*

In more recent religious history, the most prominent denomination worshipping the Father-God, but rejecting the doctrine of Christ's Deity, is Unitarianism. As an organized communion, this dates from 1790 and its basis has been defined as 'an assertion of the Unity of God and the simple humanity of Jesus Christ'.⁹ Injustice is done to the Unitarians if we describe them merely by what they do not believe; but it is hard to avoid this, because it is contrary to their position to formulate a Creed. A general outline of their convictions is belief in the Fatherhood of God, the Brotherhood of Man, the Leadership of Jesus, the Victory of Good, the Kingdom of God and the Life Eternal. Unitarians are prepared to 'acknowledge the pre-eminent position of Jesus Christ in the world's history as a teacher of religion and a prophet of righteousness'.

As we have seen, nineteen centuries of experience have proved to the Church that this estimate of Jesus stops far short of the whole truth. It deprives us of what we most need—a Divine Saviour. The idea of the Victory of the Good is very attractive, but if it relies, for the overcoming of evil in the human heart and in the world, upon the better nature of man just helped by a bit of divine encouragement, the theory does not fit the actual case. The evidence is all against the claim that human goodness is overcoming human sinfulness upon either a personal or an international scale. It is a view that does not take sin seriously enough, does not recognize how great is the

⁹ *Everyman's Encyclopaedia*.

extent of its enfeebling effect upon man's will, how thoroughly it cripples his moral power. The insight, teaching and leadership provided by the prophet are valuable aids indeed, but they do not provide the enabling power to overcome sin. They still leave man to struggle upon his own inadequate resources under continual defeat. This doctrine is no alternative to the Christian 'Gospel of the Son of God', who in His own Person brings grace from above into our human life.

(5) *A heartfelt doctrine*

It may seem that the calculating arguments of the preceding pages have little to do with the radiant religion that gives new grace and point to life. It is indeed fatally possible, in making Jesus a 'study subject', to lose Him as our personal Lord; but if our approach is reverent, the deeper understanding we gain of His Person will plant His Lordship more firmly in our hearts, for He will come to mean infinitely more to us. That there is not this cleavage between theology and experience in fact can be illustrated by placing our theme in the homely setting of Christmas. The issue can be simply stated like this: can we really have Christmas? If Arius or the Unitarians are right, our Christmas Carols are nonsense. In their view, when we sing 'Still the night', 'O come, all ye faithful', 'Hark the herald angels sing', we are indulging in arrant, sentimental make-believe.

But you and I are aware of being at the heart of life-creating truth as we sing

*Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
Hail the incarnate Deity!*

*True God of true God,
Light of Light eternal,
Lo! He abhors not the Virgin's womb,*

*Son of the Father,
Begotten, not created:
O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.*

Every Christmas we sing the most august, most profound theology of the Creeds! And our hearts feel and confirm the soul-quickenng wonder of the truth we voice, thrilling to all that it means.

III. WHY THE INCARNATION?

(1) *In Jesus God came down*

God is a Triune Being—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.¹⁰ The habit we have of sometimes using the word ‘God’ to mean the Father as distinguished from the other two Persons can be rather confusing. The Son also is God and the Holy Spirit is God. So in Jesus we have God entering our life. ‘He came to our world from the depths of God’s being.’¹¹

‘But why?’ we might ask. ‘Why should He not have equipped a man, the best man for the part, some spiritual ‘giant’ of great moral courage such as one of the great prophets, to be the Saviour of mankind? Can we see any reasons that God should take the incredible step of becoming man to save the world? In the following paragraphs, four among several reasons are suggested.

(2) *God is alone adequate to cope with our need*

Even the best of men are sin damaged and weakened. Standing in the light of God’s Holiness, Isaiah cried: ‘I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips’ (6⁵). Jeremiah felt his own inadequacy when commissioned by God to challenge his compatriots. ‘Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak;

¹⁰ We cannot turn aside here to discuss the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. A concise note can be found in *Tutors Unto Christ* (MYD), p. 56.

¹¹ Vincent Taylor, *Doctrine and Evangelism* (Epworth Press), p. 40.

for I am a child' (16). Standing high above us, the choicest saints may with one hand reach down to us, but even they fall far below the level from which the other hand can reach up to God. The saints, therefore, cannot form the link that will repair the breach between God and sinful humanity ('... for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God'—Romans 3²³).

Richard Llewellyn's hero, in *How Green was My Valley*, declares that he came to his conclusions about Christ after reading John Stuart Mill's *System of Logic* and the Bible, 'and I have never changed my mind. He did appear to me then as a man, and as a man I still think of him. In that way I have had comfort. If He had been a God, or more a Son of God than any of us, then it would be unfair to ask to do what He did. But if he was a man who found out for himself what there is hidden in life, then all have a chance to do the same. And with the help of God we shall.' Here is a tribute to Jesus, embracing the acknowledgement that if we are to live to the highest we shall need God's help; but it tears to shreds the essential Christian gospel. It assumes that Jesus is simply our ideal and nothing more. If this were so and He was divine, certainly it would be unfair to ask us to do what He did. But even had He been but man, would it necessarily have followed that we should all have had the chance to do what He did?

The artist Titian was only a man, but it is no use asking me to paint like him. The poet Keats was only a man, but you could furnish me with pen and paper and plant me on the Surrey hills for a millennium, yet you would wait in vain for an ode from me to compare with his 'To a Nightingale'. In their own spheres these men were geniuses, and although they were only men, it is simply not true that 'we all have a chance to do the same'. And one thing is crystal clear: if Jesus was but a man, he was

a genius in the realm of religion. He was able to penetrate life's meaning as I cannot; my dimmed sight cannot attain his vision of God. I cannot hope to scale the heights to which this Jesus rose. The Christian gospel, thank God, does not set Jesus forth simply as man's exemplar, but as God's grace in action. In Him God is stretching out the hand to save. Llewellyn's position does not face man's situation realistically; it assumes that the human soul is in a naturally healthy condition, needing only to catch sight of the good to desire it and be moved to pursue it unselfishly. Our 'inside information' upon human character does not square with this portrait. We are only too well aware that the human will has to be won from natural self-centredness; our natural inclination is to seek our own ends. It is this obedience to self-desire and disobedience toward God that religion calls 'sin'. A new Man (or 'Second Adam', as the New Testament puts it), one not infected by sin, was needed. This need could be met only by the Sinless Son of God entering our race and becoming man, out-facing and defeating sin.

(3) *Jesus makes God known to us*

Two parties cannot come together in a living relationship while one remains a 'closed book' to the other. God could only perfectly reveal Himself to men by Himself appearing among them; so 'the Logos¹² became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth' (John 1¹⁴). 'In Christianity God is made known in the only way in which God could possibly become known, by His own self-revelation in history and in terms of manhood. . . . In [Jesus of Nazareth] we see God Himself taking manhood that He may speak with us, and

¹² i.e. the 'Word', the ultimate Divine Reason in life, God's Heart and Mind Self-disclosed.

through Him we may come, men though we are, as near as the creature may to the God who made him. In Him God’s love speaks directly, and there awakens in us the love that can make response to the love of God.’¹³

(4) *He reconciles men to God*

To ‘reconcile’ is the New Testament word—to bring men back to God, into life-giving relationship with Him. By becoming our Brother, the Son of God makes us the kinsmen of God. Only the divine Son could fill the role of reconciler; by ‘becoming one of us’ He makes it possible for us (gives us ‘the right’—John 1¹²) to become the children of God. There is very much more to be said than this, for this great act of becoming ‘one of us’ involved Him in the sting and shame, the burden and conflict, of our sin. Out-facing and defeating sin meant for Him living the hard way, following that way to the very Cross itself. Less than justice would be done to the immense subject of the Atonement by a whole volume at this point.

(5) *He makes man’s response to God’s love*

A relationship must be alive at both ends as the following example from real life illustrates. By his criminal behaviour a young fellow was breaking his parents’ hearts. No duplicity was too mean for him; again and again he used his father’s good name to play confidence tricks upon unsuspecting strangers. Each time his father stood the cost, yet although their son’s dissoluteness was reducing them to penury, all the while the parents were eager to forgive and receive the boy back as a loving and trusted son. But the youth exploited this loving desire. Although the readiness was there on the parents’ side, the fellowship could not be restored because there was no response from the boy.

¹³ Professor Grensted, *This Business of Living* (SCM, 1939), p. 133.

Even God cannot establish a one-sided relationship. Not only must *He* reach down with Fatherly love; *man* must respond with loving obedience. Here was the impasse: sin had alienated man from God; he was incapable of rising to fellowship with Him. Yet before a life-relationship could be established between God and man, response had to come from within our race—a response that was *man's* response to God. There was but one way out: that the Son of God should enter our race and become truly man. In Jesus' perfect life of love and obedience the relationship came alive at our end. In Dr Grensted's words, quoted above: 'In Him God's love speaks directly, and there awakens in us the love that can make response to the love of God.' 'The Man Christ Jesus' became the focus of our race that we might 'come unto the Father' by the Son (John 14⁶).

IV. DID JESUS REALIZE THAT HE WAS THE SON OF GOD?

(1) *How the problem presents itself*

The question 'Did Jesus realize that He was the Son of God?' may surprise, even startle, some readers; they have taken it for granted that Jesus constantly lived in full knowledge of His divinity. But full weight must be given to the thoroughness of the Incarnation: 'He emptied Himself of all but love.' If Jesus was fully conscious of being the Son of God, how could He really be said to be 'touched with the feeling of our infirmities, being in all points tempted as we are?' If He was aware all the time of being the Son of God, how could He face temptation *as a man*? Surely for Him the force of temptation would at once be greatly diminished, if not removed, and to say that for Jesus the moral conflict was unreal and the issue a foregone conclusion would remove Him from our experi-

ence; we could not, in a deeply meaningful way, call Him 'brother'.

It is not in the purpose of this book to raise problems, nor to discuss abstruse questions, but experience proves that here is a problem that has already thrust itself before many thoughtful Christians, and therefore it cannot just be ignored.

(2) *Our evidence fragmentary and indirect*

At this point it will be well to remind ourselves that it is impossible for anyone of us to 'get inside' the personality of another. At the best, we can but guess how they feel about themselves, what form their self-awareness takes. If that is true between man and man, any view that we take about the self-consciousness of the Son of God must, even after we have sifted the available evidence, be largely a matter of conjecture,¹⁴ though based upon deduction. We are not surprised, therefore, to discover theologians differing among themselves, and it will be convenient to set down three points of view under three representative names.

(3) *Three differing views*

(a) H. R. Mackintosh writes: 'If Jesus lives in glory now, and if an uninterrupted unity binds the present majesty to the mortal career, we are led to believe that the veil must gradually have worn thinner and more translucent, until, at least in high moments of visitation, He knew Himself to be the Son conditioned in and by humanity.'¹⁵ Dr Mackintosh does not insist that Jesus always knew He was divine. He observes: 'It can only have been in mature

¹⁴ The weight of the Fourth Gospel's evidence about our Lord's self-consciousness depends on whether we consider that all the addresses of Jesus therein were given at the times described, or believe that they contain the testimony of the Divine Lord of later experience ('Christ in you') which for devout reasons has been read back into those historic occasions.

¹⁵ *The Person of Jesus Christ* (T. & T. Clark, 1937), p. 481.

manhood, and perhaps intermittently, that Christ became aware of His divinity—which must have remained for Him an object of *faith* to the very end.’ At some stage, this theologian argues, Jesus must have become aware that His unshared unity with the Father distinguished His personality from all others, marking Him out as the Son.

(b) P. T. Forsyth regards Jesus as being *sub-conscious* of His Godhead. In the depths of His personality there was an awareness of His Divine Sonship, but this awareness was not normally on the surface during His earthly existence. ‘If on earth He was always fully conscious of all He was, where were His real humiliation and His true humanity?’¹⁶ He was conscious of His unique relationship with God in the sense that He *experienced* it, but He never pressed this evidence to its logical conclusion, formulating a precise theory of His Person. At the Resurrection this sense ‘emerged into actual consciousness’. ‘He became what He was and not merely what it was in Him possibly to be. . . . In finding the sheep that were lost, He gradually finds the self, the mode of self, the consciousness, He had renounced.’¹⁷

(c) Dr J. A. Findlay concludes that Jesus was not conscious of being Divine. He called Himself ‘the Son’ or ‘the Son of the Father’, not ‘the Son of God’. He knew He was the Son of the Father because ‘He was conscious that He had always been obedient to the Father’s Will’.¹⁸ For Himself, He was aware of being distinguished from others only in His complete obedience, and indeed, He asserted that we might become ‘sons of the Father in Heaven’ by imitating His obedience. If the creeds are right ‘and Jesus had a really human experience, He cannot have been even intermittently conscious of being

¹⁶ *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ* (Hodder, 1910), p. 82.

¹⁷ *ibid.* p. 311; see also pp. 121ff.

¹⁸ *Jesus, Divine and Human* (Epworth Press, 1938), Chap. 3.

divine’. Dr Findlay maintains that the title ‘Son of God’ does not imply in Jewish parlance actual Divinity; for any righteous man could be a ‘Son of God’ (compare Mark 15³⁹ with Luke 23⁴⁷). There is abundant evidence, asserts Dr Findlay, that ‘the Son of God’ was a title of the Messiah in the Jewish nationalist sense. It was the tempter who first called Him ‘the Son of God’ (Matthew 4³); hence Jesus discouraged the use of this phrase, as He did the title ‘Messiah’ in connexion with Himself. He called Himself ‘the Son’ or ‘the Son of the Father’, not ‘the Son of God’.

It will be observed that this view far from denying to Jesus a filial sense toward God, stresses it. It affirms that our Lord had a ‘sonly’ feeling toward God and enjoyed a ‘sonly’ relationship with Him; but the fact that He was the Divine Son of God was not intellectually present to His mind. He lived the life of complete identification with God, knew Himself ‘at one’ with God; but He had not defined the nature of that oneness, had not formulated a theory of His own Person (as, indeed, it does not occur to any one of us to analyse ourselves and ‘place’ ourselves). There is, of course, nothing in this view of Jesus’ self-consciousness to conflict with the firm assurance that He is in fact the Divine Son of God.

So the debate goes on. To whatever view we incline, we must remember that in forming our opinion on the subject of the inner consciousness of Jesus, we are moving in the sphere not of known fact, but of reverent conjecture.

V. THE EVIDENCE OF CHRIST’S DIVINITY

(1) *What kind of evidence are we seeking?*

‘Give me the proof and I will accept the divinity of Jesus’ impartially minded inquirers often say. Fair enough—providing they are not asking for the kind of evidence

that in the nature of the case is ruled out. It is but plain commonsense that we are here not in the realm of the tangible; obviously, evidence cannot be brought to sight or touch. In making His concession to Thomas's incredulity, the Risen Jesus observed that the kind of proof that Thomas was asking *could* not be available generally. 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe' (John 20²⁹, *RSV*).

One wonders what people mean when they speak of a 'scientific' approach to this question. It is beyond imagination that anyone would be so crass as to look for a test-tube demonstration or a mathematical formula putting the issue beyond all doubt. It must be obvious that the Sonship of Jesus is incapable of optical or algebraic or chemical demonstration. What sort of proof remains available then? In the domain of personality the methods of logic have no more application than those of chemistry. Nobody 'arrives at' *personal* experience in this way, whether you call it deduction or induction or just plain 'Sherlock Holmes'. The only sort of 'proof' that exists in the personal realm is the evidence of personal experience—the very kind Christian theology offers in making its case for the Godhead of Christ. Biblical evidence is, after all, the account of what the first Christians found Jesus to be. 'The New Testament appeal is not made to the shrewd and logical; it is made to the heart and conscience in a real experience.'¹⁹

(2) *The Disciples convinced, despite tradition*

The Jews had a horror of deifying any human being, and everything in the first disciples' traditions (for they were Jews) was against their concluding that Jesus was the Son of God. They could give only one reason for their

¹⁹ P. T. Forsyth, *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*, p. 245.

acceptance of this belief; they said God put it into their heads and hearts. 'It was the good pleasure of God . . . to reveal his Son in me' (Galatians 1¹⁵⁻¹⁶). The Church's consciousness of Jesus' Godhead was *born*, as the Acts and the Epistles make abundantly clear, not from pondering His earthly career, but from what Christians at that present time were finding in this Jesus, Risen and Exalted. Constantly during His earthly life they had 'greatly wondered' and had been awed in His presence (Luke 8²⁵); for some there had been unaccountable moments (Mark 9²⁻⁸). They had never felt they had fathomed Him (Mark 9³²). They had grown to the idea of His Messiahship, but the idea of any human person being the Son of God was too alien to their theological training for them to *jump* to that conclusion.

When this great disclosure came home to them after the Lord's Resurrection, they looked back upon His earthly life, and then its wondrous meaning began to unfold to their new understanding. This was God living under earthly conditions; here was the perfect expression of God's will among men. Here was God in action, redeeming sin-stricken humanity. If thereafter they appeared to others to be 'turning the world upside down' (Acts 17⁶), it was because this glorious fact had suddenly turned their world the right way up.

(3) *Jesus' former companions became His worshippers*

The significance of the fact that this confession was drawn from those who had lived closest to Jesus in the days of His flesh surely cannot be missed. If people who had lived with Him on normal human levels came to believe that their Companion had indeed been the Very Son of God, and acting upon that conviction afterwards prayed to Him and declared that thus they had found communion with Him again—indeed, fellowship of a deeper, richer,

more significant quality—then that evidence is very strong indeed. Nothing less is the witness of the New Testament.

This apostolic witness is certainly given by lip and action in the early post-Resurrection period, as nearly every page of *Acts* testifies; and if 1 Peter is the work of the Apostle, it is given in writing.²⁰ Which James wrote the *Epistle of James* has not been established. If, as a minority of scholars claim, it is by the Lord's brother, the implication is tremendous; for here we have one with the closest ties of kinship, who knew Jesus in the intimacy of the family circle, classing 'the Lord Jesus Christ' with God,²¹ referring to Him as 'the Lord of glory,'²² and speaking of His reappearing.²³ If the author is the *Apostle James*, we still have the testimony of a close associate of Jesus.²⁴ However cautious we may be about the two writings mentioned, there can be no doubt that the New Testament shows that the friends of Jesus came to worship Him as God. Nor did they arrive at this belief as a result of wishful thinking. The conclusion to which these men came flew in the face of all their traditional beliefs; they were drawn on in spite of themselves. In their post-Resurrection experience, Jesus fitted in as the Son of God, and they could not fit Him in in any other way.

In the New Testament 'a gradual process can be traced in which, as Christians tried to understand their new experience, they found themselves driven to relate Christ more and more closely to God until at last they could only say that He, too, is God'.²⁵

²⁰ e.g. 13, 111, 120, 321, 22, 411, 510-11. ²¹ James 11, 39. ²² 21. ²³ 57.

²⁴ More scholars are prepared to ascribe 1 Peter to Peter than are willing to concede that the *Epistle of James* is the work of the Lord's brother or of the Apostle. Many attribute the *Epistle* to another Church leader altogether, though of the same name.

²⁵ C. Ryder Smith (lecture notes).

(4) *The testimony of modern times*

Our next evidence consists in the fact that the Personality of Jesus is a unique power in human life. The influence that He exercises today is that of a living, present and divine Personality. We see it in His power to arrest the human spirit in our own age.

Take the example of Tokichi Ishii,²⁶ the ruthless bandit, as extreme a case as one could quote. To his account stood an appalling list of murders, even children being numbered among his victims. Two Canadian women missionaries learned that he was in prison under sentence of death for the murder (to which he had confessed) of a geisha. It happened to be New Year so the missionaries sent him portions of the Japanese rice dish traditionally eaten on the first three days of the year. These he appreciatively consumed. The New Testament and other Christian literature they sent he heedlessly set aside until from very boredom he turned to the Scriptures. Ishii began to read. The gospel story gripped him. He read on—on to the account of the Crucifixion. He reached the point where Jesus prayed: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' 'I stopped,' he said, 'I was stabbed to the heart as if pierced by a five-inch nail. Shall I call it the love of Christ? Shall I call it His compassion? I do not know what to call it. I only know that I believed and my hardness of heart was changed.' The Buddhist chaplain who witnessed the execution of Ishii marvelled at the deportment of the one-time terror of Japan. He was used to criminals defying the scaffold with bravado but, the priest told Miss Macdonald, Ishii's was a different kind of fortitude. 'He faced death rejoicing greatly in the grace of God and with steadiness and quietness of heart.' The transformation was amazing—

²⁶ Ishii's own account, translated by Caroline Macdonald under the title, *A Gentleman in Prison* (SCM, 1936).

inexplicable, except to those who have sampled the power of the living Christ to save.

Lest we should conclude that the example of Ishii is but a case of the desperate condition of a cornered man breeding a fancy in a disordered mind, or even imagine that Christ's power can only operate in circumstances of despair, let us swing over to the opposite extreme—to the testimony of a young grammar school girl brought up in a good home. Churchgoing was part of her routine, but in her scheme religion was to be strictly limited to Sundays. Her Youth Club friends, however, were keen; they had been stirred by an evangelistic campaign, and they took her to a youth meeting. A challenge was thrown out and she testifies that she suddenly found herself face to face with the living Christ. 'It was as though I was in a room. He entered and somebody closed the door behind Him and turned the key. I was alone with Him.' Such was the picturesque language with which she described her soul's encounter with Christ. There and then she surrendered to His redeeming power and Lordship.

These examples have been chosen deliberately for their contrast. In the case of the brigand the situation was highly dramatic; the young girl's circumstances were as normal as could be—but Christ was real to both. Both experienced His power to arrest the soul, and although the change in Ishii appears more vivid, in fact, a transformation was wrought as surely in the young girl's life as in his. For this divine transformation only one explanation is adequate: Jesus is the Eternal, divinely active amongst us now.

(5) *His power to cope with our need*

A further 'proof' of Christ's Deity lies in His power to deal with modern man's condition. If His achievement in us is

of divine dimensions, if He accomplished within us a work which only God can do, then He *is* God. It is the testimony of the Church in all ages that Christ alone is adequate to deal with man's moral problem. Most of the failure to recognize the divine greatness of Jesus arises fundamentally from a moral failure to appreciate Him as a personal Saviour; and that follows from a defect in the estimate of the sin from which He saves.

Men have tragically discovered that a lofty ideal alone is not mighty to save, but the Christian knows how Jesus Christ has dealt with sin in himself. As our fathers put it, He 'cancels' sin *and* breaks its power; He is able both to forgive the soul that has sinned and to build up its resistance against sin's onslaughts. The essence of sin's evil is its power to separate the soul from God; it reduces man to the state of 'guilty in Thy sight', so that he shudders: 'How dare I, foul, draw near?' Now if a relationship is broken because one party wrongs the other, manifestly it can be mended only if forgiveness comes from the wronged side. If, then, Jesus Christ can forgive sins, He must be one with God, must be reaching to us from the God side. For the Christian himself this is the most convincing evidence of all of our Lord's Divinity, his own 'personal knowledge of the redeeming work of Christ and the wonder of His risen and exalted life'.²⁷

(6) *His power to keep*

Jesus not only makes a powerful *initial* impact upon men; He is also adequate to satisfy and sustain the human spirit. For the achievement of God's purpose in us lies not only in the beginning of this good work, but in the 'continuing of the same'. In every age Christians have testified that when they have rested their lives on Jesus they have been inwardly sustained. This is personal

²⁷ Vincent Taylor, *Doctrine and Evangelism*, p. 42.

experience that cannot be argued away. As J. G. Whittier has expressed it;

*In joy of inward peace, or sense
Of sorrow over sin,
He is His own best evidence,
His witness is within.*

This power of Jesus to *keep* us in relationship with God is further proof of His Divine nature. 'To give grace, peace, everlasting life, to forgive sins, to make righteous, to quicken, to deliver from death and the devil are not the works of any creature, but of Divine Majesty alone.'²⁸ 'When thou hast Christ,' Thomas à Kempis the fifteenth-century saint writes, 'thou art rich and hast enough. He will be thy faithful and provident helper in all things.'²⁹

*Thou, O Christ, art all I want,
More that all in Thee I find.*

Those lines written by Charles Wesley in the eighteenth century stir in most of us a deep emotion, because they are so profoundly expressive of our inmost experience. At the beginning of our own century people marvelled that Hugh Price Hughes was able to stay the pace of his intense and brilliant ministry. His physique did indeed ultimately collapse under the strain, so that he died burnt out at the early age of fifty-five; but his spiritual vigour never waned, and when asked for the secret of his power, he turned to Wesley's hymn for his reply:

Thou, O Christ, art all I want.

So aptly did this line sum up Hughes, that they wrote it over his grave for his epitaph.

Down the Christian years, men and women famous and

²⁸ Luther (*Werke*), quoted by Philip S. Watson, *Let God Be God* (Epworth Press, 1947), p. 105.

²⁹ *Imitation of Christ*, II.1.2.

obscure, cultured and unlettered, outstanding and average, have declared from a present experience, 'This Jesus is life to me'—a personal testimony that finds glorious confirmation in the corporate witness of the Church.

(7) *Apparent in His Church*

For nearly two thousand years the Church's life has been inspired by the conviction that Jesus is the Divine Son of God. She witnesses that He is the central Reality from whom she has derived, and still derives, the spiritual resources that sustain her vigorous life, though empires decay. The Church testifies that the spiritual values she has preserved have come alive to her through her fellowship with this Jesus, the Living Son of God, and renegade generations are finally forced to recognize their worth. Men and women have parted finally with all that was dear to them on earth and have faced appalling privations, often enduring conditions that spelt early and certain death, all under the impulse of a single urgent motive: to offer this Jesus to darkened populations.

During the second World War evidence came in a dramatic way to certain young airmen of the sway this Jesus still exerts upon the human spirit.³⁰ Crash-landing on the Solomon Islands and injured, they were cared for with the utmost gentleness by friendly natives and shielded at great cost from the enemy. Upon the testimony of the men themselves, it came home to them with great force that if this had happened but a few years previously, before Jesus took hold upon these islands, they would almost certainly have at once been butchered to death. Neither legislation nor the threat of dire penalties had been effective in the effort to stamp out cannibalism in the Solomons. In His new Body, the Church, the living Personality of Jesus had invaded the islands, and He had

³⁰ *They Found the Church there*, H. P. Vandusen (SCM, 1945).

accomplished what the law had failed to do. Christ's *present* power is evidence of His Divine nature.

(8) *And in a wider circle*

The influence of Jesus spreads wider even than the boundaries of His Church, for many who stop short of confessing Him as Lord bear deeply the marks of His impact upon their life. This fact was brought home to a missionary when some young Hindus observed to him: 'Of course, sir, it is our Christian duty to love our Mohammedan brethren.' An Indian court has provided an instance that is not without its amusing side: a Hindu defending counsel complained that the Mohammedan counsel for the plaintiff was conducting his case 'in an unchristian manner'! 'It is true, alas, that Gandhi grew more and more impatient of the Christian evangelistic approach, but both he and the other great Indian leader, Rabindranath Tagore, in their different ways drank deeply of Christian inspiration. The Hinduism to which, again in their different ways, they adhered is a Hinduism deeply modified by Christianity.'³¹

Who can possibly measure the influence Jesus Christ has exerted in our world life, or say to what extent He has modified history? Anybody who read with discernment this news item which appeared recently in our national Press must have realized how powerful had been the working of the Spirit of Christ in quiet and patient progress. 'The Wau (New Guinea) Lutheran Mission today baptized an islander who has killed 143 men, mainly in tribal wars. The mission reports that of 265 adult islanders baptized in a year, 66 have each killed more than one person. One man buried his father alive, and another four men while they were still living. Many murdered their wives or threw the sick into rivers. Most

³¹ *World Community*, William Paton.

of the baptized islanders belong to the village of Mu, in the remote Chimbu Highlands, where missionaries say the "sordid past" is being turned into a "promising future". It requires little imagination to realize how history is being changed in that island through the impact of the Personality of Jesus upon its inhabitants.

Again the story of the gradual opening up of the interior of Australia might be cited as an example of the Living Christ 'making history' through His Church. The appeal of a lonely cattle-rancher's wife for the spiritual ministry of the Church in 1904 constituted a call to young John Flynn and resulted in the formation of the Australian Inland Mission. Flynn saw that beside pastoral care the lonely settlers needed medical and other social services. As these were extended over an area wider than the whole of Europe, it became possible for inland settlers to take out their wives and raise families. Today, among other facilities, there are eight 'Flying Doctor Bases' from which aero-ambulances fly to serve the isolated settlers, while 'Ranging Padres' cover the territory in radio-equipped motor-cars. The Presbyterian Church initiated in 1912 an Australian-wide organization to assist inland settlement. To a considerable extent, the large and widespread increase in outback population in recent years has been due to the work of the Mission. This work has been inspired by the Spirit of the Living Christ who still claims men and women to further it, and it is not too much to say that His activity is changing the face of that vast continent.

If we stayed to trace the impact of Christ upon our social, national and international life in all their aspects, this would become a very long book indeed. A passing reference must be made to the fact that the clause 'of Human Rights' in the United Nations Charter owes its inspiration to the World Council of Churches—another

instance of the action of 'Christ our Contemporary' through His new Body. Is it possible, indeed, to point to any aspect of our human life unaffected by His influence? And in this highly dangerous phase of mankind's career are we not all acutely conscious that our one secure hope is that His mind and spirit should prevail among the nations?

Sidney Cave's summary of the case presents the conclusion succinctly. 'The modern attempts to depict Jesus as man alone, though noblest of men, have not failed through any lack of learning or insight on the part of the authors. They have failed because His life cannot thus be explained.'³²

³² *The Doctrines of the Christian Faith* (Hodder, 1932).

CHAPTER TWO

'Jesus is Our Brother Now'

I. OUR LORD'S TRUE HUMANITY

(1) *The Extent of the Christian Claim*

WHEN the Church declared her belief that the only-begotten Son of God '*was made man*', she really meant it; she gave to those words their most complete and thorough-going meaning.

The Creed is not content with the suggestion that the Son of God posed as a man, as, for example, Greek mythology pictured gods and goddesses assuming the appearance of human beings by simply adopting human bodies. A story connected with Lystra relates that Zeus and Hermes once came down in disguise and wandered about dressed as artisans. They were refused food and shelter by the people of wealth and fashion, but at last found welcome in the humble home of two cottagers, Philemon and Baucis.

There is all the difference in the world between Zeus coming down *disguised as* a man and God *becoming* man in Jesus. God perceived that to redeem mankind He had not merely to come amongst us; He had to get *into* our Race. As we have said, salvation must be wrought on the personal level; a response to God's advances must come from the heart of the race itself. If a boy breaks with the spirit of the family, leaves home, and becomes dissolute and destitute, the father may drag his lad back to the house, but he cannot make him one of the family again until the boy's love is won back and he is in fact in relation once again with his parents. He must again be

'at one' with him in spirit. Even if it were possible (and it is not), God would not be content merely to give the privileges of sonship to men who remained strangers to Him; He will be content with nothing less than that the children of men should in fact become the sons of God. So, by Himself entering our race, He brought into it the dynamic by which the human heart becomes 'alive unto God'. From within He lifted our humanity into the Divine Fellowship. There was no other way. As Luther declared: 'We are undone if we cannot say, "This *Man* is God!"'

It is indeed an amazing claim to make, that Very God became truly man. As the Christian philosopher Origen (A D 185-254) reflected, here we have the supreme marvel of all time, that the 'very Word of the Father . . . the very Wisdom of God' should exist as a man who became 'greatly troubled in death', who was even a wailing infant. 'We see in Him things so human that they differ in no respect from the common frailty of mortals.' This is an idea no reverent man would dare to concoct, one which could not be reached by human thought. The Church dares to believe it for one reason alone—it is revealed truth.

(2) *That Jesus lived is not in doubt*

That Jesus really lived is a fact too well established to need any argument today.¹ Even those thinkers who stop short at confessing His Lordship agree that He is a historical figure (e.g. H. G. Wells: 'One is obliged to say: "Here was a man. This could not have been invented."')² Most of them indeed think of Him as the greatest of the great and regard Him as the turning-point of history. There is the ring of reality about the Jesus who moved through the pages of the New Testament. He belongs to our life and is so truly human that our natural desire is to

¹ Those wishing to pursue this point farther should read H. G. Wood's *Did Christ Really Live?* (SCM, 1938).

² *Short History of the World* (Pelican, 1937), p. 148.

get near to Him. We feel at home with Him. So transparent is this genuineness that it needs no hallmark.

To entertain the view that Jesus is a fictitious character invented by a fraudulent group with an axe to grind would place too great a strain upon the imagination. In practical, material terms, the reward the first Christians could expect for preaching Jesus was almost every kind of trouble. Men who were fools enough to invite such suffering with a *concocted* story, would not have had the mental capacity to give reality to their fiction. In fact, if the story behind the Christian gospel is the invention of men, the authors must have been the outstanding geniuses of all time; for their hoax has inspired millions to triumphant living, has immeasurably bettered life, and is still the greatest power for good today. One needs to be very credulous to accept any theory of make-believe as an explanation of the Christian faith! It means assuming the existence of incredible geniuses who conceived in their own imagination the amazing character of Jesus, and then portrayed their invention with extraordinary restraint, and gave it such convincing reality that even today people involuntarily speak to Him as though He is alive and are constantly under the delusion of communing with Him. For rational minds, a more straightforward explanation commends itself, namely, that the Christian faith is rooted in the historical life of a real Person.

(3) *A claim too extreme for some minds*³

The idea that infinite God became mortal man is so extraordinary that there have always been Christians who have been unable to accept it to the full. These good people have believed that the Son of God came amongst us, and most of them have believed, up to a point, that He clothed

³ If this section plunges rather deeper than the reader desires to go, it can be omitted without the thread of the book being lost.

Himself with our humanity. But they have made reservations.

Some sects in earliest Christian times held that Jesus' body was a phantom body—for example, the Docetists who taught that Jesus only 'seemed' to have flesh. John repudiates their ideas in his first Epistle (e.g. 1 John 1¹, 4², 5⁶⁻⁸). Gnosticism, a system woven from Greek, Oriental, Jewish and Christian ideas, proved a thorn in the flesh to the Church from roughly the end of the first to the middle of the third centuries. This placed Jesus Christ in an elaborate pattern of 'Aeons' which were supposed to form a hierarchy of divine manifestations. The Gnostics believed that matter was evil, and therefore they could not tolerate the thought that God had any real connexion with the flesh. They maintained either that Jesus, the Aeon, temporarily inhabited the body of an earthly Messiah, or else that He descended to earth with a phantom body. These theories are now obsolete and need not detain us, but their hold over men's minds in early Christian times was considerable. Under their influence one prominent theologian⁴ was persuaded that Christ's body could not be identical with ours, but only *like* ours. One school even went to the extreme of arguing that Christ's body must have undergone a process of 'uncreation' that it could so share the Divine Nature's quality of being 'not made'!

The anxiety of devout men to affirm the deity of Jesus without detracting from the 'Wholly Otherness' of God has sometimes caused them unintentionally to undermine the true humanity of our Lord. One⁵ maintained that the place of the human mind was taken in Him by the Logos, and that He had not a human free-will because, so the argument went, this was the seat of sin. Another⁶

⁴ Eutyches (Fifth century).

⁵ Apollinarius (Fourth century).

⁶ Clement of Alexandria (c. AD 150-215)

declared that Christ's body was not subject to the feelings of pleasure or pain, and that it was so nourished by a 'holy energy' that it did not need food; Jesus ate only to save His companions from the impression that He was a phantom unlike themselves. It is noteworthy that Arius⁷ asserted that Jesus had no 'soul', so that on his showing, He was neither truly God nor truly man.

As theologians endeavoured to interpret the truth that Jesus was both human and divine, a theory was developed that two 'natures' existed in Him side by side. By some it was further contended that these natures communicated their attributes to one another. Thus Cyril of Alexandria (died A.D. 444) credited the *manhood* of Jesus with omniscience and explained that when He appeared to be uninformed (e.g. Mark 9²¹) He was 'usefully pretending'. As late as the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Lutheran theologians presented the human Jesus as being omniscient and omnipotent, but as hiding the fact until He had risen from death. Indeed the point was reached where there was ascribed to Jesus of Nazareth even the attribute of omnipresence (despite the New Testament evidence to the contrary—e.g. Luke 24³⁻⁴, 49, John 6¹⁵).

These views have been set out at some length in order to show that as soon as men entertain a less than complete doctrine of Incarnation, they present an unreal and untrue picture of our Lord. If, because we shy at the amazing implications, we shrink from the confession that God really became man, we make shipwreck of the humanity of Jesus Christ.

(4) *The humanity of Jesus is complete*

'Blessed Mystery' is a phrase traditionally used of the Incarnation. If anyone feels that this description exaggerates, it is because he has missed the incredible wonder

⁷ See p. 20 above.

of what happened. Before we reach the question 'How can the Infinite God contract Himself to the dimensions of our humanity?' we must be confessing that it is a 'mystery' to us that the idea should ever have *occurred* to God, let alone that He should act upon it. Think what we are saying—that God, the Eternal, Infinitely Wise and Holy, the Majesty enthroned above all worlds, became a little child exposed to the wrath of violent men, was nurtured in poverty and at length died the death of the Cross. And why? To redeem the very race that despitefully used Him! If that does not constitute 'mystery' to us, nothing will.

Beyond this is the mystery of *how* this could happen.

*Our God contracted to a span,
Incomprehensibly made man.*

This is an unfathomable wonder. Men have tried to probe the mystery for centuries. They have neatly tabulated the attributes of God and explained which of His qualities He forfeited upon becoming man and which not; but as we should expect, no theory has proved satisfactory. Paul has set down the truth without trying to analyse it in Philippians 2, where he affirms that 'He, who had always been God by nature, did not cling to His prerogatives as God's Equal'⁸ 'but emptied Himself'; and Charles Wesley, taking up this theme, has provided us with the most satisfying doctrinal statement upon this subject in a single line: He

emptied Himself of all but love.

This is a daring claim, but nothing short of it will suffice. To argue that our Lord retained some 'uncanny perception' so that He could read others' minds or get possession of hidden information, that He held on to

⁸ J. B. Phillips's translation (Bles).

some 'property' which gave Him supernatural powers, that He harboured superhuman resources which made the issue of any moral conflict in which he was involved a foregone conclusion is to tamper with the doctrine of the Incarnation.

That He performed miracles is not called into question; but as He Himself insisted, in these He was the medium of God's action,⁹ even as the Apostles were after Him, and as healers are to this very day. His work depended upon human faith,¹⁰ and in large measure His power lay in His ability to call forth faith in men. Having this faith supremely Himself, He was the perfect agent of God's mighty works. That He could perceive, as none other, the spiritual condition of men is reverently acknowledged; that was because He was perfectly attuned to His Father and consequently had a perfect spiritual sensitiveness. That He lived without sin is gloriously true; that was not, however, because He was made of different stuff from us, but because He drew upon all the resources of God by living in complete dependence upon Him. That He taught with authority is very evident; but that was because, living the life of perfect obedience, He entered into the Mind of God.

All His spiritual perfection we adoringly confess, but it does not detract from His essential humanity. When we say that Jesus is our brother, we mean nothing less than that He was human as we are human, that like ours His mental vision had its boundaries, and that there were limits to His physical powers. Moreover, His spiritual life was one of dependence upon God; His strength was faith, His vital breath was prayer. As we shall see, this is borne out by the New Testament evidence, and it makes of the Incarnation not a lesser marvel, but a greater, richer, more glorious one.

⁹ John 5³⁶, 14¹⁰.

¹⁰ Matthew 9²⁸⁻⁹, 13⁵⁸.

(5) *The presentation of the Gospels*

It does not occur to the writer of the Synoptic Gospels¹¹ to discuss our Lord's humanity any more than Peter's, Zacchaeus's, or any other person's. This is highly significant because it means that there is no question in their minds but that it was normal. We are given a natural picture of a Jesus who, like other men, gets hungry (Mark 11¹²), who under physical torment grows too weak to carry the beam of the Cross, so that another must be compelled to carry it for Him (Mark 15²¹), and who in His hour of agony is smitten with a great thirst (Mark 15³⁶, John 19²⁸).

Not only in His physical constitution is Jesus truly human; He shares the limitations of man's mental life too. Like His brethren, He had to grow intellectually (Luke 2^{46, 52}). He had to ask questions like any other man to gain information (Mark 9²¹). Right up to the very end He recognized the wisdom of God to be greater than His own understanding (Matthew 26³⁹). He is a Jew, thinks like a Jew, lives like a Jew, but like many of His compatriots, His outlook is broadened and enriched by the Greek influence that had infiltrated the Roman world. Jesus is quite human in His appreciation of pleasure, as His enjoyment of the table and the friendship of 'at homes' and feasts demonstrates (Mark 14³, Luke 5²⁹, John 2¹⁻²); His characteristic symbol of joy is a feast (Luke 15²³⁻⁴, Matthew 22²). In common with other men, He is liable to mental anguish and apprehension (Mark 14³³⁻⁴). He shows symptoms that point to the possession of a normal nervous system. When tired, He must sleep (Mark 4³⁸). Pity brings Him to tears (Luke 19⁴¹). Anguish affects Him physically: 'Being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat became as it were

¹¹ See additional note, p. 58, below.

great drops of blood falling down upon the ground' (Luke 22⁴⁴).

At no point is Jesus' humanity more clearly revealed than in His faith. His is a religion of dependence upon God. When He enters into spiritual conflict, becoming the target of temptation, He needs the comfort of Heaven (Matthew 4¹¹); both in the face of big issues (Luke 6¹²⁻¹³) and in the common round (Mark 1³⁵), He turns in humble reliance to God. He carries out His very ministry under God's authority (Luke 11²⁰). The Fourth Gospel lays an even heavier emphasis on Jesus' dependence upon God. Here Jesus is reported as saying: 'The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father doing' (John 5¹⁹), and again: 'The words that I say unto you I speak not from myself: but the Father abiding in me doeth his works' (14¹⁰). He declares that He has been sent by God to manifest Him to men (17⁸).

It seems desirable that something should be said at this point about the title found most frequently upon Jesus' own lips—'*the Son of Man*'. It is often, perhaps generally, assumed that Jesus' purpose in using this was to identify Himself with us men, that it meant in effect: 'I, too, am a child of your race.'

Scholars have shown that there is much more behind this title than that; for it was one that had had a specialized meaning in the religious vocabulary of the Jews. This fact comes out, for example, in the examination of Jesus before the religious court of the Hebrews (Mark 14⁵³⁻⁶⁵, Luke 22⁶⁶⁻⁷¹). Later on in this book¹² it will be pointed out how in Jewish literature the Son of Man grew to become a superhuman being who descended into our world from a pre-existent glory. For instance, in the book of Daniel (7¹³), written in the second Century B C, 'one like unto a son of man' comes to rule over the fifth and last kingdom

¹² See pp. 114-17, below.

after the rule of the four beasts had each in turn been destroyed.

Now, from the fact that this being bore a human appearance instead of the bestial one of his predecessors, it can be argued that the idea of kinship with man is contained in the picture of '*the Son of Man*'. That element may well have been in Jesus' mind as He used the expression, but the whole history of the title, and the significance it obviously had for Jesus' contemporaries, prove that the name meant very much more than merely 'a man'. Hence, in marshalling our proof of Jesus' real humanity, we do not place this phrase foremost among our data. It would more properly be placed among our evidence for the divine role Jesus fills in God's plan of world redemption. We shall therefore deal more fully with the title '*the Son of Man*' later.

Additional Note: The Synoptic Gospels

The first three Gospels are called the Synoptics (Greek for 'eyeing together'), because their treatment of the life of Jesus is broadly similar. Their aim is to provide a historical outline of His life. The purpose of the Fourth Gospel is different. Here narrative is interwoven with exposition; John is not a historian only, but an interpreter of history. Although the background and ultimate aim of the Synoptics is doctrinal, they do simply set down the facts and leave Jesus to make His own impression; John is concerned to *interpret* the acts and words of Jesus so as to bring out His significance. The contrast is, however, more far-reaching than this: the Synoptics, although they differ in detail, record many of the same facts, but John makes an almost entirely original selection of events and discourses. For a fuller examination of this subject the reader is referred to Dr Vincent Taylor's *The Gospels: A Short Introduction*.

(6) *The witness of the early Church*

The earliest Christian teaching, while undoubtedly ascribing full divinity to Jesus,¹³ clearly assumed His normal humanity. Peter speaks of Him as 'a man approved of God unto you by mighty works,' and recalls 'how that God appointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power' (Acts 2²²). This mention of Nazareth sets Jesus squarely in the human scene among people who knew Him for what He was.

The Apostle Paul does not debate the humanity of Jesus; he simply assumes it. His references provide all the stronger testimony because they are incidental to his main themes. Manifestly, in his view there is no need to make out a case for the kinship of Jesus with us. 'God sent forth his Son, born of a woman . . .' (Galatians 4⁴). God's Son was 'born of the seed of David according to the flesh' (Romans 1³). The reference in 2 Corinthians 8⁹ is to the divine Lord of glory taking to Himself our humanity: 'For ye know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through His poverty might become rich', a theme which is outlined more explicitly in Philippians 2⁶⁻⁸ (quoted on page 54, above).

The Letter to the Hebrews uncompromisingly asserts the normal humanity of Christ: 'In all things . . . made like unto his brethren' (2¹⁷). Its writer coined the phrase 'in the days of His flesh' and portrays the Man of agonizing prayer, the Man who learned obedience through suffering (5⁷⁻⁸), who knew the strain of human temptation, 'being touched with the feeling of our infirmities; . . . one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin' (4¹⁵).

These few examples suffice to show that the Apostolic

¹³ e.g. Peter uses the term 'Lord' interchangeably of the Father and of Jesus (Acts 3¹⁹⁻²⁰, 10³⁶, 42⁴, 29, 11¹⁷).

teaching did not swerve from a thoroughgoing declaration of the complete humanity of Jesus Christ.

II. QUESTIONS RAISED FOR THE MODERN MIND

(I) *In the light of modern discoveries concerning man*

The last half-century has witnessed some remarkable discoveries in such departments of Science as Biology and Psychology. The question of heredity has been explored, account being taken of factors like the gametes which, we are informed, from the moment of conception provide the materials of the character to be. There has been research into the bearing of man's physical constitution upon his psychological life—the part the glands play, for instance. Sociology has explored the question of the effect of environment upon character.

Now, theology does not work in a vacuum. Her Doctrine of Man must take account of these researches and, because of her insistence upon the true humanity of our Lord, so must her Doctrine of Jesus Christ. Indeed, whatever the 'scientific' problems theologians meet in presenting the Christian Doctrine of Man, these confront them in sharpened form when they set forth the Christian view of Jesus. How, for instance, can they argue for a Sinless Man in face of what has been established concerning man's psychological and physical inheritance? It is not possible within the compass of this book to tackle these questions in detail, even if the author were fully qualified to deal with them. Nothing more than a pointer can be given to the direction in which the answers may lie. The important thing, however, is that we should realize that theology is aware of these issues and faces them. Theology has not a one-track mind, pursuing its way in ignorance of what is happening in other fields of science.

It must be pointed out, too, that few of these problems

are new to theology. For example, heredity has been taught through the Christian centuries under the oft maligned doctrine of Original Sin; but the Gospel has also held out to men the one way of escape from the entail of their past. It assures men that God has broken into their life with a new power—the power of redeeming love.

The whole question of the relationship between the body and the personality ultimately revolves around the issue: 'How far is spirit master, and how far servant, of the physical constitution clothing it?' Today, Medicine acknowledges more freely than before that the psychological attitude of the patient contributes largely (many doctors would say decisively) to his condition. A healthy 'state of mind' is essential to physical health. To jump to the conclusion that we are vassals to our gametes, nerves and glands, is to be guilty of half-baked thinking, of making unintelligent assumptions. What matters basically is how we *react* to the conditions under which we are born and among which we live.

Preoccupation with the body's influence over personality too often obscures the obverse truth of character's effective influence upon the body. That our glands affect our conduct is undeniable; so also is the fact that our behaviour affects the functioning of our glands. Persistent giving way to anger, for instance, will cause the adrenal glands to flow excessively and result in bad-tempered character.

In a perfectly balanced personality the glandular and neural systems would be perfectly adjusted and controlled. The perfect manhood of our Lord, extending over every area of His life, implies this psychological balance. He was a completely integrated personality. He kept His soul in perfect health through His intimate fellowship with the Father.

(2) *The virgin birth*

For centuries Christians felt no misgiving in affirming the belief that Jesus was 'born of the Virgin Mary'. Recently, however, this article of the Creed has been called into question. The issue is not vital to the Christian position. The fact that Jesus is the Son of God become man is of the very essence of our faith; how He became man is of secondary interest. Therefore it would seem best to set down the main arguments with skeleton brevity, and leave the reader to make his own judgement.

The reasons many theologians give for rejecting the dogma of the Virgin Birth may be summarized under four headings:

(a) *Textual grounds.* The case that the disputing school brings against the age-old position is that the passages implying a virgin birth occur in what are claimed to be doubtful parts of Luke and Matthew, and in them alone. The arguments run thus: Elsewhere than in Chapter 1³⁴⁻⁵, Luke's Gospel takes the natural paternity of Joseph for granted.¹⁴ Matthew 1¹⁸⁻²³, it is averred, betrays all the features of pagan myth (wise men, astrology, symbolic gifts, and so on); manifestly, this is a legendary section that has been woven into the genuine historical narrative; moreover, the story has been 'bent' to fit in with the author's interpretation of Old Testament prophecy.¹⁵ It is pointed out, furthermore, that in both Gospels Jesus' genealogy is traced back through the family tree of Joseph. Nowhere else in the Gospels or the Letters is there evidence of the supernatural birth of Jesus.

It is replied that the attempt to show inconsistency between the Virgin Birth passages and the rest of the New

¹⁴ e.g. Luke 2³³, 48.

¹⁵ This view is hotly contested by other theologians. See articles 'Birth of Christ' and 'Virgin Birth' in Hasting's *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels* for a fuller discussion.

Testament is forced. Nobody questions that Joseph filled the role of father in Jesus' life. The critic's treatment of Matthew follows from their preconceived theory. The tracing of Jesus' genealogy through Joseph is due to the ancient (and for that matter, the modern) obsession with the male issue as the line of descent. The argument from the silence of the rest of the New Testament is unscientific and would not be tolerated by the logician. The phenomenon could be true without its being repeatedly mentioned—even without its being universally known. The most that could be deduced from the New Testament is that quite early two traditions existed, one *possibly* unaware of, the other accepting, the Virgin Birth.

As a postscript, it may be added that Isaiah 7¹⁴ is not relevant to the discussion. Isaiah makes clear that this prophecy was to be fulfilled in Ahaz's own period; by the time a child then conceived by a young woman (not virgin) had attained moral discernment, the Assyrian invasion of Israel and Judah would have begun. Characteristically, the writer of the first Gospel sees in this statement a forecast of the Incarnation.

(b) *Biological grounds.* The crux of the objection from this viewpoint is that, since human birth is invariably caused by the union of a cell from the male parent with another cell within the female, the male parent would be indispensable in the birth of Jesus. The adherents of the Virgin Birth doctrine meet this objection with one answer only: Christ's birth was due to a special act of divine intervention. 'The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee . . .' (Luke 1³⁵). Now that C. S. Lewis has made it respectable to believe once more in miracles,¹⁶ it would not seem reasonable to brush aside the claim for *this*

¹⁶ *Miracles* (Bles, 1947). See also *The World and God*, H. H. Farmer (Nisbet).

miracle without giving it a hearing. As medical men and biologists are numbered amongst those who accept the Virgin Birth, it must not be assumed that the elementary facts of conception are unknown to all who are persuaded of the doctrine.

The Incarnation confronts us with a miracle however we regard it. Somehow the eternal Son of God made His way into our humanity, entered the life-stream wherein normally personality, no less than the physical being, originates through the union of parents. How from the physical union of Joseph and Mary the personality of the eternal Son of God entered the human race is just as inexplicable in normal terms as the Virgin Birth. Brunner, in rejecting the Virgin Birth, recognizes that by so doing he has explained nothing. 'It is not my desire to enter into controversy about the doctrine; rather I would here express my indifference to this and all other attempts to explain the miracle of the Incarnation.'¹⁷ This, he declares, is not to be explained biologically. He prefers to leave the Incarnation itself as the miracle.

(c) *Pagan religions provide parallels.* It is pointed out that pagan religions also have their stories of 'virgins' bearing children to the gods. Take as an example the story told on the temple wall at Luxor of the virgin-birth of Amon-hotep III. According to this, the god Amon-Ra incarnated himself in the royal person of Thothmes IV and 'went to a virgin that he might be a father through her'. Some scholars have argued that 'the Christian myth of the Virgin Birth crept into the Gospel narratives' from such pagan sources.

This contention has been met by H. R. Mackintosh on two counts. First, the Jewish circles in which the Virgin Birth stories were first current, far from welcoming these ideas from heathen sources, would have recoiled from

¹⁷ *The Mediator.*

them in horror. Secondly (and the foregoing example illustrates this), the pagan legends do not tell of births out of virginity, but the very opposite—of sex intimacy between gods and women. The parallel between these pagan myths and the Gospel record is superficial; the two are not in fact connected.

(d) *Theological grounds.* Some feel that the real objections to the doctrine of the Virgin Birth are theological. 'There is a growing feeling that the Incarnation, to be complete, must have begun with a natural birth, and that unless Jesus is fully human on both sides, he fails to express such a complete divine sympathy with a suffering and erring humanity as that maintained, for instance, by the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews.'¹⁸ This contention seems capable of the following interpretations:

(1) 'The Incarnation, to be complete, must have begun with a natural birth.' Some modern psychologists lay considerable stress upon the physical experience of birth being a potent factor in shaping a person's whole approach to life. If Jesus did not share this universal human experience, He was not completely identified with us. But there is no suggestion in Matthew and Luke that Jesus' *birth* was other than normal; it is the conception of the Child that is presented as supernatural. So far as the experience of birth was concerned, His would be wholly one with ours.

(2) Had God ordained that His Son should enter our life otherwise than through the normal union of man and woman, this would have betrayed some withholding of a complete willingness to 'come down' to our life—to express Himself perfectly in human terms. The convincingness of that statement must be judged by the reader for himself.

(3) If Jesus were not begotten by a human father, He

¹⁸ T. H. Robinson, 'Matthew', in the *Moffatt New Testament Commentary* (Hodder, 1937), p. 5.

could not in a thorough sense be human—‘He has not assumed our whole humanity’; by which we must understand that He would not have completely human feelings in human circumstances, that He would have subtle advantages in meeting our normal situations, that He would come to life as a ‘super-’ human being. This statement, in fact, assumes the whole case and must be examined in the light of the whole contents of this book—indeed more, it must be examined in the light of Christology as a whole. Particularly does this question link up with the subject of the self-consciousness of Jesus.¹⁹

A comment of Dr J. S. Whale may fittingly bring this note to its conclusion. ‘The meaning of the Virgin Birth is ultimately dogmatic: it is one of the many ways in which the New Testament asserts that the Son of God came into history; he did not come out of it.’²⁰

III. THE VITAL IMPORTANCE OF THE REALITY OF CHRIST’S HUMANITY

(1) *We must hold on to Christ as our true Kinsman*

By His supreme act of grace in sending His Son to be ‘born of a woman’ (Galatians 4⁴), God has eliminated the distance separating us from Him; He has brought us near (Ephesians 2¹³). In Jesus God has revealed Himself to us in human terms. For all our sense of the ‘wholly-otherness’ of God, we can dare to be at home with Him, because He has placed His Son on a common footing with us, made Him our Brother. This, above all, is why His kinship is so precious to us. God, the Majestic, Glorious God, becomes approachable; for Jesus places us ‘on terms of intimacy’ with His Father.

*This awful God is ours,
Our Father and our Love!*

¹⁹ See above, pp. 34-7. ²⁰ Christian Doctrine (CUP, 1942), p. 109.

All this depends upon Jesus being our *real* kinsman. Anything that threatens to remove Him from us would jeopardize our relationship with God. He must be *real* man. No tampering with His humanity can be tolerated, no matter how pious or well intentioned the motive behind the interference. Only if Jesus genuinely lives within the confines of our humanity can we truly call Him man. As we have seen²¹ pious motives have led some good men to entertain the notion that He was omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent.

Such fantastic views were short-lived, being unable to survive the fresh air of rational religion.

The crude notion that because Jesus performed miracles He possessed unrestricted power to do anything suggesting itself to Him finds no confirmation in the New Testament. He regarded Himself as the instrument of God's power and straightly declared: 'The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father doing' (John 5¹⁹). 'The Father who dwells in me does his works' (John 14¹⁰ RSV). His power to perform miracles depended upon the faith of His fellows. When He would have ministered in His native region, 'He could there do no mighty work' because of the unbelief of His fellow-countrymen (Mark 6¹⁻⁶). Jesus' ability to perform miracles rises from His close alignment with God and His consequent power to evoke faith in His fellows. This gift does not lift Him from us, place Him in another category, indicate that He is 'made of another stuff'. The Acts of the Apostles is studded with accounts of miracles performed by *men* who had become the channels of God's power, as Jesus had promised would happen (John 14¹²). Jesus' wondrous acts in no way call the genuineness of His humanity into question.

The identification of Jesus with us in a common

²¹ pp. 51-3, above.

humanity becomes entire at the deepest of all levels—on the plane of spiritual experience. His kinship with us reaches completeness in His religious dependence upon God, His sense of human need showing itself most clearly in His prayer life. 'Not only did He turn to prayer in times of crisis—He always did that—but prayer was the very nerve of His everyday life. When the evangelist remarks that He "went up into a mountain to pray", one senses the normality of the act.'²² That great thinker Thomas Aquinas expressed the view that Jesus had no need to draw upon the sustaining strength of heaven, that His prayers were offered merely for our enlightenment. Such a view threatens the doctrine of the Incarnation at its very heart. A spiritually self-sufficient Person would have been utterly unlike us at the very core of personal being; but this Man, in common with us, must needs turn to the Father for spiritual sustenance. He must meet temptation with prayer. He needs times apart for refreshment. His prayers are not offered for our instruction, but out of His need! This Man leans hard upon God. He falls to His knees in adoring worship, in expression of the love He feels for the Father, when a great sense of God's love overwhelms His soul—love answering the love of God, the very essence of religion. He constantly relies upon God's guidance for the next step and learns the whole direction and purpose of His life out of His relationship with His Father. In prayer He bows His will to God in the perfect submission of loving obedience. Thus in His religious life, in His constant reliance upon the resources of God, He was truly man.

The sense of Jesus' kinship with us comes into sharpest focus upon the Cross in that moment when He uttered the Cry of Dereliction (Mark 15³⁴). In the cry 'My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?' we get a glimpse

²² *Staying the Course*, E. G. Frost (MYD, 1954), p. 24.

into the consciousness of Jesus. Christ has so become one of us, is so truly human, that the awful sense of human sin descended upon Him as a thick cloud. Sinless, He had no awareness of personal guilt, but so complete was His identification with the human race that He suffered to a supreme degree the dire effects of racial sin. His soul, in its holiness acutely sensitive to sin, shared to the full our shame, and He drank, to the last dregs, the bitter cup of sin's consequences. As members of a family, themselves guiltless, feel the sting of the sinning member's shame, so He felt the appalling foulness of sin's contamination. Man's true kinsman, He experienced the horror of sin's worst evil—the sensation of alienation from God. It is unthinkable that God had in fact forsaken Him; but to Him it felt like that. 'That was how He felt—worn out, betrayed, spat upon, rejected. We feel that God was more there than ever.'²³ How could Jesus have entered more completely into our humanity than by touching our sinful experience at its very bottom, by being deprived of that awareness of God that meant life to Him?

The only view of our Lord that satisfies our religious, as well as our rational, nature, is the one that covers the *whole* length of our humanity. 'In *all things* made like unto His brethren' (Hebrews 2¹⁷). There must be no retreat from the forthright declaration of the New Testament. As Martin Luther stressed: 'We cannot make Christ too human.' The Christian Gospel is not just the buoyant announcement that Jesus Christ has a cordial interest in our lives, but the vital, revolutionary declaration that 'for us men and for our salvation' He has become blood of our blood and flesh of our flesh—'not merely brotherly, but Brother'.²⁴ As another has put it: 'The King of Glory has entered right into our humanity.'

²³ T. R. Glover, *Jesus of History* (SCM, 1929), p. 192.

²⁴ C. Ryder Smith (lecture notes).

(2) *Sharer of our common life*

We do well to reflect regularly upon the difference the Incarnation has made in our day to day life, by giving it new significance. If the eternal Son of God stepped into our life to labour with brain and muscle; if He 'did share at Nazareth the life of an earthly home'; if He entered with unaffected happiness into life's pleasures; if, in a word, He lived the same life as we live—that life appears in an altogether new light. And He did.

There is evidence that as far back as the second century an 'intellectual' (Celsus, the earliest known writer against Christianity) was sneering at the notion of a Saviour who was a manual worker. Even his Christian opponent in debate (Origen) was at pains to explain the idea away. Quite a number of the faithful have through the ages been embarrassed by the thought of the Lord being a carpenter, but the right-minded Christian sees the wealth of significance this plain and simple truth holds. It becomes clear that there is no room in the Christian life for the view that an elegant and merely leisured existence is exalted. In his right senses no Christian would ever smother the fact that he worked for his living as though there were something inferior about a working life. Our meanest labour now has worth because it is joined to the Son of God's!²⁵ By His Incarnation our Lord has not only changed man's inner life; He has also redeemed man's situation. Jesus represents life as it ought to be—or rather, He helps us to see it as it really is.

The fact that Jesus laboured at a carpenter's bench abounds with practical implications. One pertinent for our day, for instance, is the certainty that He would perform every task worthily and work always as in the sight of God. Therefore, whenever men gain this vision

²⁵ Charles Wesley's hymn, 'Servant of all' (*MHB* No. 575).

of the dignity of labour through Christ, their sense of responsibility quickens and deepens. The early Trade Unionists saw clearly that Jesus stood for 'fair pay for the job' (Luke 10⁷) and so they campaigned for this right with moral fervour. But since the driving force of their endeavour was their sense of moral righteousness, we can be sure that they were as keen to *give* value for money as they were to secure a fair return for their labour. This they learned from Jesus, and any worker who has the spirit of Christ will be as equally concerned about doing a fair day's work as about receiving a fair day's pay.

In entering our world and sharing our sin-invaded environment, God has set His seal upon our common life. He has not abandoned this world to the powers of evil as some misguided zealots would. Far from despising material things, He has shown the value He places upon them. His teaching displays His interest in the plain things of home life (e.g. Mark 2²¹⁻²). He treats our common needs with respect (Matthew 7⁹⁻¹⁰). He so relished His meals that His opponents tried to make capital out of His healthy appetite (Luke 7³⁴). The attitude that developed among some in the Sub-Apostolic period of contempt, even hostility, toward the body found no place in Him. His many works of healing prove that. He reverences the physical as well as the spiritual side of marriage (Mark 10⁶⁻⁹). Thus Jesus sets our material life in its true light. 'God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good' (Genesis 1³¹). Such is God's appraisal of the world we are living in, and He spoke His last word upon its worth when He sent His Son to be a member of our race.

The truth exhibited in the Incarnation is, then, basic to our daily life. God's will as expressed in Jesus is that we should enter into the whole of life. The notion that to be 'spiritual' we must withdraw from the wide, colourful

world of variety and interest into the cramped shell of religion is shown to be false; so is the idea that 'religion' and 'life' have to be kept in separate compartments. In the divine pattern, the spiritual and the material are warp and weft, blending to make the cloth of life. Religion imparts its value to the whole.

This is the principle set forth by the modern community on the island of Iona, where laymen and clergy share a common life, both engaging in prayer and labour; then they return to their respective spheres to continue their work in the spirit of the retreat. For this community, this alternation of spiritual devotion and labour forms the perfect rhythm. Dr George MacLeod expresses their view-point thus: 'While contemporary faiths insisted that the spiritual was to be discovered in the etheric other-worldly, Christ entered the physical at Christmas to declare the nexus of the spiritual with the material; disparate but conjoined. And in prophecy, to declare their ultimate reunion—in His own Body.'²⁶

'That life which I now live *in the flesh* I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me,' declared the Apostle Paul (Galatians 2²⁰). The Incarnation shows the value God places upon our day-by-day life. It repudiates the cynical view that life is vain and empty. Living in the sense of doing one's daily job responsibly, being a true partner within the family, fulfilling one's role in the nearer and the world-wide community, enjoying the wholesome joys of earth, and so on, is entering into 'eternal' (real) life. Since all is related to God's life with His world, our daily life can be lived in faith, can be lived toward God. Our day-to-day existence acquires a richer tone when it is seen in this light; heaven penetrates earth, and by its illumination we discover the true and permanent quality of life. All this

²⁶ *We Shall Rebuild* (Iona Community), p. 13.

truth is contained within the glorious fact of the Incarnation.

(3) *God expressed in full measure through Christ's perfect humanity*

The life of Jesus has another important value for us. Because He was perfect man, God was able to express Himself perfectly through Him.

Jesus' command, 'Ye shall be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect', occurs in the context of His homily upon loving one's friends and enemies impartially (Matthew 5⁴³⁻⁸); in other words, it is the call to perfect love. Of this, His own life is the supreme example. As man, Jesus is the perfect medium of the divine revelation. He, uniquely, revealed the Father by letting His light shine before men (Matthew 5¹⁶). There was no shadow of sin in His nature to obscure the light of God; so true was His Personality that the love of God suffered no distortion as it reached the world through Him. The Letter to the Hebrews says: 'He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of His nature' (1³ RSV). As Divine Son, He radiates the very Being of God; as man, His Personality represents the character of God as truly as the imprint of a stamp represents the pattern of the die from which it is impressed.

This is of supreme importance to us, first because when we ask 'What is God like?' we have the complete answer in human terms—in the form we can understand—'God is like Jesus'. If we would know God's attitude toward human kind, we have but to observe Jesus' behaviour toward His fellows. His compassion for the lost displays God's compassion for the sinner. His sternness toward hypocrisy reflects God's severity toward flint-hearted pride. His will to make men whole shows God's attitude to suffering. Ultimately, His readiness to tread even the

path of the Cross reveals the lengths to which God's love will go to reconcile man to Himself.

Again, Jesus' manhood is the pattern of our own. He has shown us what man can be when, living in complete dependence upon God, he draws upon the resources of the Spirit. His is the perfect life. The Christian's goal, in fellowship with Christ, is to attain 'unto a fullgrown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ' (Ephesians 4¹³).

(4) *Necessary to Christ's Saviourhood*

Only by being true man could Christ be our redeemer. The crowning meaning of our Lord's historic life is aptly summed up in the sentence of the well-known hymn: 'The Saviour of the world *has come*.' The eternal Son has come down to us, genuinely assumed our humanity, in order to be our Saviour.

This is the fact, central and vital, that leaders of Christian thought have guarded by their insistence upon a thorough-going doctrine of Christ's complete humanity. Thus a voice from the fourth century²⁷ repudiates the view that Christ was not normally human. 'That which He has not assumed He has not healed. . . . If the whole of Adam's nature fell, it must be united to the whole nature of Christ . . . and so be saved whole. Let them not begrudge us our complete salvation or clothe the Saviour only with bones and nerves and the portraiture of humanity.' Here Gregory pin-points the primary truth: Christ has redeemed just as much of man as was real in Him. The great Augustine fastens upon the same point: 'Christ Jesus the Son of God is both God and man; God before all worlds; man in our world.' Sin 'cannot be pardoned and blotted out except through the one mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus'. The

²⁷ Gregory of Nazianzus.

theologian regarded by the Roman Catholic Church as one of its great authorities, Thomas Aquinas, using the language of the then dominant theory of the Atonement, argues along similar lines: it is because Christ was truly man, that His sacrifice gave satisfaction for man's sin. By this work, He as man won for humanity merit deserving God's favour.

For the Reformation, its great pioneer Martin Luther emphasizes that the prime significance of our Lord's humanity is its redemption-value for man. We come to God first by discovering in the revelation of Scripture the Man Christ Jesus. God, who alone can purge and restore the human soul, was able to save because He became man. Luther maintained that the Church Fathers had sometimes fought shy of confessing the manhood of Christ; but in truth the Gospel, the Good News that God saves in Christ, is only possible if we can say: 'This *Man* is God!' Far from needing to tone down Christ's humanity, we must firmly assert 'He ate, drank, slept and waked; was weary, sad, joyous, wept, laughed; was hungry, thirsty, cold; sweated, talked, worked, prayed' in order to regard Him as Redeemer. Nor does the other great Reformer, Calvin, drop behind in his insistence upon the need for the Redeemer to be genuinely human, for he argues that Christ must be man as well as God, so as to obey the Father in man's place.

It is important that we should see clearly that in all this the Church is not thinking of Jesus merely as our example as He stands a man before God. In making the response of perfect obedience and perfect love to the Father, He gathers all mankind to Himself. The whole race is focused in Him. He is humanity presenting itself to God. How else are we to understand our Lord's great saying: 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one cometh unto the Father, but by me' (John 14⁶)? Manifestly,

this statement cannot mean that all the righteous who lived before the first century are precluded from eternity with God. Nor can we believe that the good men of other faiths will be denied eternal fellowship with God because, having inherited their own tradition, they have not been able in this life to confess the absolute Lordship of Jesus. If that were so, Paul would have been wrong in writing Romans 2¹³⁻¹⁶. Assured as we are of the justice and the mercy of God, we cannot but believe that they who follow the measure of light that has reached them will be 'accepted in the beloved', though there is no excuse in this for those who close their souls against the full revelation of Christ when it is available.

The great truth stands out crystal clear: in becoming man, Christ Jesus has become the Saviour of the World.

(5) *A human Saviour for a personal redemption*

One of the most remarkable lives of the last century was that of George Müller, who, after being pastor of a Devonshire church, established by faith an immense orphanage at Bristol. He wrote the story of his life, beginning with his conversion in a profligate youth, under the title: *The Lord's Dealings With George Müller*. One can hardly fail to be impressed with the aptness of the title. It brings home the *personal* nature of God's working in the life of man. Here we have the key to God's strategy. He has wrought man's salvation along personal lines, as indeed He must, in the nature of the case.

When we speak of a person being 'saved', we mean that he is brought back into right relationships with God. Manifestly, when a man is won back to sonship with the Father, the restored harmony must consist of a relationship working from both ends, God's and man's. Just as an earthly father is unable alone to repair his relationship with an estranged son, but depends upon the boy's

response, so it was impossible that the relationship between God and man should be restored while there was no effective answer from the heart of man. But the quondary God faced was this: although this was true, our sin-enfeebled race was spiritually incapable of responding to His love and holiness.

Paul frankly describes the former state of his hearers as, 'strangers to God, and, in fact, through the evil things you had done, His spiritual enemies'.²⁸ The Colossians were not a special case; apart from the grace of God, this was the universal condition of mankind (Romans 3⁹⁻¹⁰, 23). Our race was spiritually inert and unable of itself to rise to the advances of God. Yet the response must come from within the race, if real fellowship was to be established. Fellowship cannot be maintained from one side alone; its apt symbol is the hand-clasp. Some folk have discovered a superior merit in the Oriental custom of grasping one's own hands in greeting—it is more hygienic! Nevertheless, I prefer the Western mode. What could be more eloquent of fellowship than the hands of two parties reaching out in a mutual clasp? 'All life is meeting.' A personal relationship is possible only when each advances to each and the twain meet.

This, then, was the dead-lock God faced. He could reconcile man to Himself only if man, on his part, would respond to His love; yet man was unfitted to respond. God, in His love and wisdom, found a way out. One from His own life would enter right into our humanity—One who was very man, but not spiritually impotent, One capable of rendering perfect obedience to the Father, able to return love in all its fullness for the perfect Love of God, in His own person binding humanity to God in a personal bond, that the healing, vitalizing life of God should flow through our race. The weakness of our race

²⁸ Colossians 1²¹ (J. B. Phillips's translation).

would be overcome from within, and sin would be defeated on its own ground.

Such a statement does not, of course, cover the whole truth; to suggest that would be an over-simplification. Sin is not merely a constitutional weakness, or even just indifference. It is wilful. It is spiritual fixation upon selfish and carnal ends. It is the stubborn rejection of God's Will. The clash of God's good purpose with human sin meant the Cross for Jesus. Our Lord did not swerve from the path that led to the Cross; far from yielding in His purpose, Christ made the Cross the supreme occasion of Love. Part, not all, of the sense in which He bore man's sin was that, by bearing with him in his sin, Jesus loved man into spiritual response to the Love of God. The Cross is to be understood in personal, not legal terms.

The motive of our Lord's Incarnation is recorded in John 10¹⁰: 'I came that they may have life and may have it abundantly.' This fulfilment of life is found, alone, in fellowship with God (. . . now that ye have come to know God, or rather to be known of God'—Galatians 4⁹). So Jesus came to 'bring us home' to God' If we are to become God's relatives—the children of God—through our relationship with the Son of God, clearly the Son's relationship with us must be real. As vital to our Gospel as the truth that Jesus Christ must be truly God, is the complementary fact—He must be genuinely man.

*O loving wisdom of our God!
When all was sin and shame,
A second Adam to the fight
And to the rescue came.*

*O wisest love! that flesh and blood
Which did in Adam fail,
Should strive afresh against the foe,
Should strive and should prevail.*

*O generous love! that He, who smote
In man for man the foe,
The double agony in man
For man should undergo.*

*Praise to the Holiest in the height,
And in the depth be praise:
In all His words most wonderful;
Most sure in all His ways.*

JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

CHAPTER THREE

Crucified, Risen, Reigning

I. THE ATONEMENT

(1) *Jesus Christ cannot be understood apart from His Cross*

To omit the fact of the Cross when describing the significance of Jesus Christ, would be rather like explaining the solar system without mentioning the sun. The Cross is the clue to Christ's Person and His Work; for what He is and what His life means to humanity are there revealed in clearest light. The doctrine of the Atonement is so complex that theologians normally concentrate upon it as a subject in itself, and if we tried here to deal adequately with a theme so far-reaching and profound, this book would grow to double its present length. We cannot do more than just cross the frontier and point to the territory that opens up for the inquiring heart and mind. The reader would, however, be gravely misled if the brevity of our treatment gave him the impression that the Atonement was anything but the heart of Christian theology. We urge him to further reading upon this all-important subject.¹

(2) *Christ's life and death a single whole*

We must remember that when we isolate our Lord's death upon the Cross from the rest of His life in order to study its redeeming purpose and power, we do this simply for our own convenience. The separation does not exist in fact. We are misguided if we refer to this or that point in

¹ e.g. *A Plain Man Looks at the Cross*, Leslie D. Weatherhead (Independent Press). Also *The Cross of Christ*, Vincent Taylor (Macmillan, 1956).

His earthly career (His Incarnation, His Death, His Resurrection) and say: 'It is at this point that Christ wrought our redemption.' The whole of His life, from the manger, to the mount of the ascension, is a single indivisible act of redeeming love. 'For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved' (John 3¹⁷). Our Lord's willing submission to the Cross shows God pursuing this redeeming purpose in the face of evil at its worst.

(3) *Sub-moral interpretations of the Atonement Repudiated*

It seems that it is necessary to remove certain misconceptions concerning Christian thought about the Cross. We might have spared ourselves the necessity of making these points but for the recent demonstration that there are still people, even in educated circles, who assume obsolete ideas to underlie the Christian doctrine of the Atonement. 'Surely any modern child must feel that there is something morally wrong in the idea of a God giving His Son as a sacrifice as the price of man's redemption?' said Mrs Margaret Knight in her celebrated broadcast.

From our earlier reflection it will be seen at once that the Crucifixion is not to be thought of as the agony stipulated by God as the price of man's pardon. To entertain such a view would be to do grave injustice to the character of God. Nor must we place the slaying of Jesus alongside the rites of pagan religion as, for example, practised by the African forest dweller. To suggest that Jesus submitted to brutal death in order to earn the favour of God or placate His displeasure is, again, a sad distortion of God's character. Nor are we to interpret the death of Christ in terms of Hebrew ritual sacrifice. The saving element in Hebrew sacrifice was in fact within the worshipper himself, not in the creature slain, nor in the mode of its slaughter. The ritual 'worked' when, and only

when, it expressed a sincere attitude of spirit within the suppliant. These performances expressed man's acute sense of his own deep need, the need to be brought back into relationship with God. They constituted man's way of acknowledging his own inadequacy; he called in a third party (the victim) to be his reconciler to God. This yearning for a mediator was in fact to find its answer in Jesus Christ. God did provide a 'Third Party' through whom He and man could meet, but it was man's sin and not God's will which determined that this Mediator should *die* in the pursuit of His redeeming purpose.

In Old Testament religion, then, ritual provided the medium through which man surrendered to the mercy and goodness of God. This is the rudimentary form of the act through which the Christian finds God—*faith*. But God has provided a truer Way to Himself—His own Eternal Son. It is 'through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ' that we are saved. We acknowledge a unity, then, between the Old and the New Testaments; but this is not to say that we interpret our Lord's sacrifice as the Old Testament Hebrew interpreted the sacrifice of the beast. We are not committed to a theory of guilt transference, the notion that the responsibility for *my* sins is shifted on to another Victim. Similarly, we repudiate the idea that my sins can be liquidated by the physical fact of that Other undergoing excruciating pain, or by spilling His blood. These interpretations would reduce the spiritual significance of the Atonement to the level of mechanistic occultism or magic. The interpretation of the Atonement has to be carried to a level deeper than our scientific humanists seem to be aware—to the plane of personal relationships. It concerns what Baron von Hügel called 'the most real of relations between the most living of realities—the human spirit and the Eternal Spirit, God'.

(4) *Terms that have their value—and limits*

Seeking to express the meaning of the life of Jesus Christ, the meaning that appears most clearly in His purposeful death, the New Testament writers borrowed expressions from the Old Testament and from current legal and philosophical usage. Later theologians built upon these according to the thought-forms of their own periods. Thus a Christian terminology grew up composed of such words as ransom, redemption, sacrifice, propitiation, reconciliation, justification, satisfaction, substitution. These thought-forms have been valuable for throwing light upon various aspects of God's dealings with man; but they must not be pressed into doing more than they were meant to do.

Two of these words, for example, were borrowed from the legal procedure that had to be followed in the ancient world to free a slave from bondage, or a prisoner-of-war from captivity. This process was named '*redemption*',² and the price paid was called a '*ransom*'.³ These pictures usefully convey the truths that through Christ the sinner is given freedom and that God achieved this liberation at great cost to himself. But we must not go on to infer that man is in fact saved by a legal process, or begin debating to whom the price was paid.

So, too, an expression like '*sacrifice*'⁴ may embody another truth about God's dealings with man; but we must not infer from this that the death of Jesus functioned literally as the death of an animal was believed to act in Hebrew ritual. When the Hebrew spoke of '*sacrifice*', the process of slaughter under select conditions was regarded as itself effecting man's deliverance from the results of guilt. Under the Priestly Code, salvation was believed

² Used, e.g., in Romans 3²⁴, Ephesians 1⁷, Colossians 1¹⁴.

³ Used by our Lord Himself (Mark 10⁴⁵).

⁴ 1 Corinthians 5⁷, Hebrews 10¹².

to be achieved by ritual means; in Christian belief, Christ's Death operated at a personal level. In a word, the theological terms are richly suggestive, but they must be carefully kept in their place as metaphors and not be given literal force.

(5) *'He came down and died'*

We are not so artless as to imagine that we can make plain in a few concise sentences how the Cross 'works', but we must give some indication of the way in which the Atonement fits into the theme of this book, that the basic fact of Christian theology is 'Jesus is Immanuel—God with us'.

In Jesus God meets our situation, deals with sin at our level and on our behalf. The clause of the Apostles' Creed, (He) 'suffered under Pontius Pilate', reminds us that the drama of the Crucifixion is an event in history; it belongs to our human story. The Christian preaching of the Cross begins with man where he is, in his need to be reconciled to God. Man's sin is real and, because it destroys his relationship with God, is deadly. Sin-enfeebled man cannot repair the broken fellowship himself; the restoration can be made only through God's forgiveness. The meaning of the Cross lies in what that forgiveness involves.

Those who react with distaste to the preaching of the Cross have objected: 'If God wants to forgive man, then let Him. Surely He could do this without dragging in the horror of the Cross.' What these people ask is that God should say: 'Let's just forget man's wrongdoing and pretend it never happened.' In passing, we may reflect that this attitude asks the God who is Truth both to deny Himself and to wreck the moral order of His Kingdom. more directly related to our theme, however, is another vital fact: this attitude underrates the true nature of divine forgiveness. God is concerned to go much farther than merely overlooking a fault; His loving desire is to

bring man back into His life. To gloss over a misdeed would be an easy way out, but this would not deal with the sinner's *condition*. He would still not be won back, would not be healed and restored; he would still be alienated from God. It is because God has not been content with anything less than the reconciliation of man to Himself that He has faced the cost of the Incarnation and the Atonement.

In Jesus, God came into the world and confronted sin as a human being. That is how He became liable to the Cross; for the conditions that gradually closed in on Jesus germinated in the sinful heart of man (e.g. Mark 3²). The Crucifixion and the events that led up to it occurred within the framework of our human life. It was because Jesus lived in Holy Love in our sinful situation that He inevitably met sin at its worst; for in the cruelty of crucifixion we see the extreme debasement of callous ingenuity, and in the bitter self-centred bigotry that was willing to use such a fiendish instrument for its own ends we see the utter degradation of the human spirit. This was the price God had to pay for man's redemption, and the Cross was effective because, and only because, the King of Glory entered right into our humanity. Only so could He gather mankind into His own Person and lift us up in that filial response to God which restored the living relationship between God and man (Ephesians 2¹³, 17-18).

The other affirmation we would make as we look at the Atonement in relation to the Incarnation, is that in the Cross we see God in action. The error that God placed the onus of man's salvation on the shoulders of His Son while He stood apart from the conflict—even angrily above it—we utterly reject. Remembering how perfectly the Father and the Son are one, we see that 'God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself' (2 Corinthians 5¹⁹). We misread the Cross if we think that the Son of God is

there a passive victim. On the contrary, in enduring the Cross He is pressing on unremittingly with God's firm purpose of triumphing over sin in its fight for the soul of man. The Cross, we repeat, is God *in action* in our human life. As Dr A. W. F. Blunt has put it, here is 'love militant against unlove, until unlove becomes love again'. And in the words of W. R. Maltby, '... to bear sins means to go where the sinner is, and refuse either to leave him or to compromise with him; to love a shameful being, and therefore to be pierced by his shame; to devote oneself utterly to his recovery, and follow him with ceaseless ministries, knowing that he cannot be recovered without his consent, and that this consent may be indefinitely withheld. . . . This is what Jesus did upon the Cross, and it is the innermost secret of the heart of God.'

(6) *'He died that we might be forgiven'*

' "Atonement" is an old English word meaning the restoration of unity ("at-one") between persons who are estranged.'⁵ God's purpose in sending His Son into the world was to bring man into 'at-one-ment' with Himself. God made man for Himself. The divine Love could not be satisfied, nor man's true life be fulfilled, while man remained estranged from God.

'The Work of Christ' is a name theology has given to the redeeming activity of our Lord. This may be viewed under two aspects: what Christ has done *for* us and what He does *in* us—'forgiveness' and 'restoration'.

First, the problem of forgiveness had to be faced. A perfectly Holy God could not come to terms with sin. The idea of the Righteous God being on the footing of fellowship with a soul still infected with sin, still uncleansed, is inconceivable. Only cleansing could render man fit for fellowship with God. That is true from God's side, for He

⁵ Dr C. H. Dodd, *The Meaning of Paul for Today*.

is 'of purer eyes than to behold evil' (Habakkuk 1¹³). This is not a question of mere revulsion; it is true that God does view evil with loathing, but divine Love grappled with sin despite this revulsion. The matter cuts deeper: it is that God and evil do not mix. The need for forgiveness is urgent from man's side, too; for in his sin man could not bear the Presence of God. It would not be heaven to the sin-diseased soul to be in the light of God's Holy Love, but hell.

Jesus came into the world, then, bringing God's forgiveness to man, and He persisted in this divine work of mercy even through the bitter trial of the Cross. Moderns shy at sentences like 'the blood of Jesus his [God's] Son cleanses us from all sin' (1 John 1⁷) because they read them with superficial literalism. In the physical sense it is true that Jesus shed His blood; this, however, was the outward and visible evidence of the grace that was at work. It was at a spiritual level that the grace of God came into action through the life and death of Jesus Christ to bring forgiveness to sinful humanity.

Our generation has recoiled, again, from the suggestion that Christ died to 'satisfy' the Holiness of God, but it should examine the idea afresh before throwing away the kernel of truth it contains along with the harsh associations with which it has become encrusted. The *Satisfaction Theory* has preserved the truth that God does not come to terms with sin, that He will not lower His standards to accommodate it. In this respect, in the life and death of Jesus, God does set forth His Righteousness for His own satisfaction. God suffered the sacrifice of His own Son rather than yield His integrity and imperil the moral order of His Universe.

Further than this, the Cross vindicates the *Love* of God. Archbishop William Temple went so far as to say: 'Even if the Cross had no results, it would still be Christ's glory;

for His death is the sealing of His victory. That His body should die was no defeat; defeat for Him must have taken the form of cursing His enemies or sinking into self-concern. But through all the anguish love was serenely unshaken.⁶ So the Love of God shines from the Cross unwaveringly. Since evil at its worst could not make it falter, the Cross represents the supreme victory of the Love of God.

If we get down to a sufficient depth, we discover truth in all the classic theories of the Atonement. For instance, under the idea of Retribution theologians have set forth the fact that under the fixed laws of God's moral Universe, sin does work out its own punishment. Christ saw clearly that 'the wages of sin is death' and so accepted God's sentence on sin. By making a perfect confession for our sins, Christ dealt with God on man's behalf. One theologian has likened sin and its consequences to a great river ('the waters of retribution') and says Christ did not ask the river to stop for Him, but entered it and suffered all its fury.

This throws light on the assertion that Christ's was a *Vicarious*⁷ sacrifice. It has been objected that guilt is a personal thing and therefore cannot be transferred: it is irrational to suppose that even God can *shift* the guilt I bear as a consequence of my sinning from me to Christ, so that I am innocent and Christ is guilty. That is true. It is in a sense different from this that Christ's suffering is vicarious. By identifying Himself with us through the Incarnation, entering right into our humanity, He shares the consequences of our wrongdoing. It was by laying Himself open, as a member of our race, to the retribution that inevitably follows from wrongdoing, that He 'bare

⁶ *Readings in St John's Gospel* (Macmillan, 1949), p. 195.

⁷ 'to act in the place of another', 'in our stead'. The principle of vicarious suffering is choicely expressed in one of the Servant Songs (Isaiah 52¹³-53¹²).

our sins in His body on the tree . . .' (1 Peter 2²⁴). By becoming our kinsman He was able to absorb the consequences of our sin; thus He withstood the shock of evil's assault upon our race.

(7) *He died to restore man to God*

The other purpose of the Work of Christ was to repair the relationship between man and God which has been broken by sin. By forgiveness the obstacle to this fellowship is removed and its *restoration* has become possible.

'Communion with God is the very end of man's being.' Because man was created for the very purpose of enjoying God and being enjoyed by Him, once his sin has been dealt with, his spirit has capacity for rising to the highest of personal ends, entry into the divine life. Forgiveness removes the fear that would cause the soul to shrink from God ('perfect love casts out fear'—1 John 4¹⁸), but still the soul must be quickened to the new life.

Man's alienation from God was not due to God's ceasing to be Fatherly, but to the 'deadness' of man's response. Mankind had become 'turned in' upon itself; self-pleasing and self-serving, it had become incapable of responding to God. Man was 'dead in his sin' (Ephesians 2^{1, 5}), and even when the Cross made forgiveness available, the spirit of man needed to be revived. By living upon a basically 'worldly' diet man had developed an appetite for that kind of satisfaction alone. He had become 'carnal'—pegged down to earth. He had not the taste for the fellowship of God.

Christ had to turn hearts that were fixed upon selfish and carnal ends to God—so there had to be a work of Grace within to 'persuade the conscience and the will'. As H. R. Mackintosh puts it: 'Christ is a Redeemer who quickens and restores the soul by inward Grace.' 'All the redeeming influences of the Cross stream into the life of

the believer.' Love has to break through the indifference of the soul until, rising in grateful wonder, it is able to reach up and close with the loving advances of the Holy God. The Love of God, active in the Cross and the Resurrection, is the potent force that brings life to the soul. 'The last Adam⁸ is a life-giving Spirit' (1 Corinthians 15⁴⁵; see also Romans 6⁴⁻⁵). When men accept Christ the Crucified, responding to the Divine Love that endured the Cross, they find 'life in His name'.

(8) *The change is wrought in man—not in God*

An error to be firmly rejected is the notion that the Cross wrought a change in the heart and mind of God. Some theorists have maintained that Christ, by His extreme suffering, managed to persuade a reluctant God to give up the idea of punishing and destroying the race that had offended Him, and that that is how the Atonement 'worked'. Now there is New Testament authority for speaking of the *severity* of God (Romans 11²²). We do 'the Majesty on High' less than justice when we represent Him as an easy-going Deity. God's attitude toward sin is that of unbending judgement; but while He consistently 'hates the sin with all His heart', He 'still the sinner loves'. The whole point of His merciful design is to rescue the sinner from the condemnation that must fall upon sin. Hence the need for the Atonement.

An examination of Scripture will show that the Bible never speaks of God's being reconciled to man, always it is man who has to be reconciled to God. It is man's disposition that has to be changed, not God's. Philip Watson, commenting upon Luther's doctrine, writes: 'Christ's atoning work is God's own work, and so far from being directed toward God in order to change His attitude to

⁸ J. B. Phillips's translation of 1 Corinthians 15⁴⁷ explains this phrase—'The Second Man came from heaven and is the Lord Himself'.

men, it is directed toward men in order to bring them into a new relationship to God, if only they receive Christ into their hearts by faith.⁹

*The world He suffered to redeem;
For all He hath the atonement made;
For those that will not come to Him
The ransom of His life was paid.*

CHARLES WESLEY

Even Christ cannot save those who will not come to Him in faith.

II. THE RESURRECTION

(1) *Fact or legend?*

The picture shown to us toward the end of the *Gospels* is that of a scattered band of disciples from whose world the bottom had been completely knocked out. Their leader was dead and all the hope they had concentrated in Him had collapsed. In terror of their lives, they dared not go out 'for fear of the Jews'. In the *Acts* they are found openly courting death, entering the enemy strongholds to preach Jesus as the Prince of Life, embarking upon incredible journeys and facing severe privations to preach their Gospel. One of three explanations is possible.

(1) The first of these is that the disciples perpetrated a deliberate fraud, deceiving the world with a concocted story of Jesus' resurrection. Against this theory, however, stand at least three insuperable difficulties. Its advocates have to explain how the men who were so recently paralysed by fear have, without any genuine hope, mustered the courage to dare inevitable suffering and death. Further, they have to explain *why* these men undertook such hardship and danger, if all they were doing was foisting a hoax. And again, these theorists have to explain

⁹ *Let God Be God!* (Epworth Press, 1947), p. 173.

how it comes about that the Pharisee Saul came to join the new sect; for until his conversion, he was consumed with a passion to stamp it out. Why should he have suddenly veered round to perpetrate a falsehood he had been so zealous to destroy? Clearly he was an intelligent man and it is impossible that he should have been taken in by men who told him tales about a resurrection which they knew had never happened; yet it is still more incredible that he should have endured such suffering and loss—even unto death—simply to plant a deception upon his own and succeeding generations. If, despite all this, anyone persists in arguing that Paul was a deceiver, he must explain the Apostle's indiscretion in writing 1 Corinthians 15 within some twenty years of the 'alleged event'! Obviously, the person who wants to plant a hoax is well advised to keep the number of his sham witnesses down; but Paul recklessly cites five hundred people who saw the Risen Jesus, even adding that most of them were still alive at the time of writing. Because this is the kind of evidence that could be checked, the impartial reader will recognize this passage as clear testimony to the genuineness of the New Testament account of the Resurrection.

(2) The second possible explanation of the Resurrection stories is that the disciples were the victims of hallucinations, but this theory leaves some extraordinary things to explain. First, there were ultimately no exceptions within the circle of Jesus' friends; all were convinced that He had in fact risen. That Thomas was at first sceptical and came to believe despite his 'scientific caution' only adds further weight to the evidence. All suffered the same delusions—a remarkable instance of corporate hallucination! Secondly, these so-called delusions began to make a tremendous impact upon the then-known world; upon the admission of their fiercest opponents, the first disciples began 'turning the world upside down'. The

whole course of world history was changed dramatically by the 'mistaken fancies' of this insignificant little group of people living in an out-of-the-way corner of the Roman Empire. Moreover, this transformation worked immeasurably for good; life gradually became nobler, more hopeful, more humane and merciful. Enduring moral and spiritual values were brought to light, eventually creating a new civilization and lighting man's spirit with confidence and hope. Did ever fanciful notions produce such positive and gloriously wholesome effects? Yet further, this explanation asks us to believe that these 'fanatics' have somehow continued to communicate to countless Christians this hallucination of theirs, of holding fellowship with a Living Christ, ever since they became addicted to it themselves. The human race is notoriously credulous, but really this theory places too great a strain upon the will to believe.

(3) There is a third possibility: that the witness of these men and women is true. If Jesus did re-enter their lives at the point of their lowest despair, revealing Himself as the Lord of life and God's purpose as the heart of all life and the main artery of their own, then here was a sufficient motive for their determined courage, joy and enthusiasm. The change wrought in history and the experience of successive ages of Christians could be adequately accounted for if in fact divine power *was* released into the world at this point. Unlike the others, this explanation is *rational*. If history is to make sense at all and sanity be credited to millions who have claimed to know God in the Living Christ, the Resurrection must be accepted as a factual event.

That it was a factual event is suggested, not only by the testimony of the disciples, but by a story, put about at the time by those who opposed them. Bribe by the Jewish authorities, the soldiers set to guard the tomb

spread the report that Jesus' disciples stole the body during the night while the sentries slept (Matthew 28^{11f}). Their story, on the face of it, is most improbable. Even if the guard—a *group* of men—were to doze off (strange dereliction of duty!), surely, as trained soldiers, they would have been on the alert again at the least movement or sound. But according to their story, they must have settled down to a very heavy sleep indeed, for they were not disturbed by the disciples breaking the seal, rolling away the heavy rock which closed the tomb, and carrying off the body!

A second improbability is that this suggestion of theft once again supposes that the disciples perpetrated a fraud. We have already called attention to the absurdness of such a suggestion. Beside the fact of the obvious integrity of the men themselves, it is quite irrational to suppose that the apostles provided themselves with a motive for their subsequent self-sacrificing enterprises by perpetrating a deliberate lie. Nor can we trace the source of a ministry with such tremendous results to a fabricated story.

But the fact of the rumour being set afoot that the corpse was stolen is highly significant, for it must mean that *the body was missing*. The very nature of the accusation the authorities made (through the soldiers), amounts to an admission that the body had disappeared from the tomb. Jesus' enemies were most anxious to scotch the story of the Resurrection. If Jesus had not risen, there was a very simple way of proving this—to produce the body. Manifestly, there was only one reason why they did not: *the body was not there*.

(2) *Difficulties presented by the Resurrection story*

These are mainly biological and concern the physical improbability of a corpse being restored to life, particularly a body that has been dead three days. Can we,

without resorting to such naïve explanations as that Jesus had merely swooned, intelligently accept this claim?

(1) There are those who take the view ably presented by Professor John Baillie in *And the Life Everlasting*.¹⁰ He suggests that two traditions about our Lord's Resurrection are represented in the New Testament. The earliest account, contained in 1 Corinthians 15, makes no mention of an empty tomb, or of the risen Jesus performing such physical actions as eating. Such deeds, it is argued, would not have conformed to the principles laid down in the same chapter—'flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom' and 'the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed'. Paul, like Jesus Himself, says Baillie, accepted the Pharisaic tradition that in the next life, we shall be provided with a new embodiment, angelic bodies, 'made from the light and glory of God', and this was in fact the nature of Jesus' body. If this tradition be accepted, he maintains, the accounts of physical behaviour on Jesus' part, eating fish, offering His woundprints for Thomas to feel and so on (implying that the Risen Jesus had not yet put on incorruption) must be regarded as accretions to the true story. This view would make it more easy to understand the appearance of Jesus behind closed doors and His almost simultaneous appearances in places far apart. Baillie points out that the appearances are conditional upon the faith of the beholder. Faith, he argues, admitted the believers to a vision of the intangible Presence, 'opened their eyes to a Reality that was seeking to invade their consciousness'. Baillie marshals his evidence effectively and states his case forcefully in the fifth chapter of his book.

(2) Many intelligent Christians stand by the claim that the corpse of the crucified Jesus was physically restored and revitalized. It is stressed that the New Testament

¹⁰ OUP.

claims that the Resurrection was the result of the direct action of God. ('Him *God raised up* the third day'—Acts 10⁴⁰, etc.). We read nowadays of doctors massaging the heart and restoring to life people who have literally been dead for some minutes; surely, it is argued, it is a shrunk view of God that puts it beyond Him to achieve after a day and a half what men are able to do after some minutes. Nor, if it is in the purposes of God, is it incredible that God should suspend the process of decomposition. As to the question of the body passing through locked doors and yet being solid enough to handle (John 20¹⁹⁻²⁹), a half century ago this might have seemed scientifically inconceivable, but under current scientific exposition matter has become so unsubstantial (being resolved ultimately into a form of energy) that the Gospel record no longer offends a rational intelligence. If God had His reasons, He most certainly could call into play super-normal laws (not necessarily *unnatural* forces) which as yet are beyond human knowledge.

God *had* His reasons: He 'gave Him to be made manifest . . . unto witnesses that were chosen . . .' (Acts 10⁴⁰⁻¹). It is all very well to say that Jesus could have risen spiritually without rising physically; of course He could. But would this fact have been manifest to His stricken disciples? It was imperative that His victory over death should be exhibited, that this group, so humanly dependent upon sensuous experience, should grasp without doubt the truth of His living Presence. The physical appearances were a concession to the disciples' weakness and to ours; for we should have had no confidence apart from these historical appearances within our human environment. That is why the demonstration was made in the strongest terms—'manifest . . . to us, who did eat and drink with Him after he rose from the dead' (Acts 10⁴¹). Once God's purpose has been recognized, there is

nothing in the Resurrection story that need prove an impediment to faith.

The trustworthiness of the New Testament record has been established again and again. Those who are persuaded of its veracity will find in Frank Morison's *Who Moved The Stone?*¹¹ a very careful analysis of the evidence which confirms the Christian claim that 'Christ is Risen indeed!' Yet, as H. R. Mackintosh has pointed out,¹² ultimately it is Jesus Himself who gives credibility to the Resurrection record. 'To grasp or acknowledge worthily the Risen Lord, a man must have been impressed with Jesus in a certain way. Our faith in the Resurrection, though it finds occasion in the Gospels, draws its intensity and passion from our sense of Jesus' greatness; we so trust the power and the glory of the Christ depicted in the Gospels that the apostolic witness to His triumph wins our free assent. What would be fantastic if asserted of another, clearly is predicable of Him.'¹³

(3) *Why Jesus returned to His disciples*

'Once God's purpose has been recognized, there is nothing in the Resurrection story that need prove an impediment to faith,' we have written. Then let us look more closely into that purpose.

(a) *He returned in answer to His disciples' need.* At first, to the followers of Jesus the Crucifixion had been a crushing defeat. In some respects the despondent words of the disciples on the Emmaus Road are the saddest in the Bible: 'But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel' (Luke 24²¹, RSV). 'We had hoped . . . but!' One of the reasons Jesus appeared to His friends was to show them that their earlier hopes had not been dashed, that they were about to be realized in a far more majestic way

¹¹ Faber.

¹² *The Person of Jesus Christ* (T. & T. Clark, 1937), p. 364. ¹³ *ibid.* p. 316.

than they had ever dreamed—in a word, to deliver them from their despair. That their Master was not a defeated dreamer, but was Messiah indeed, in a far deeper and more expansive sense than they had hitherto imagined, had to be made plain to them. They must realize, beyond a shadow of doubt, that 'the Cause' was not snuffed out; it had scarcely been launched.

Not only to the first disciples does the Resurrection witness gloriously to the fact that the purpose of God, threading its way through the Old Testament, has struck its greatest blow for victory in the Incarnation and Passion of Christ; it is evidence to our thirsting sight as well. What would be our position if the Gospel accounts finished at Good Friday? Since the Resurrection was a cardinal fact for the Apostle Paul (e.g. Acts 9¹⁻⁹, 1 Corinthians 15³⁻¹¹) and the other writers, it is doubtful whether the Epistles would have been written at all; but at most the letters would have been abstract essays dealing with spiritual principles. As it is, the firm knowledge that Christ is Risen gives substance to our conviction—the clear-cut assurance that our immortal Lord is leading us in triumph.

The glad confidence that 'He arose and is alive for evermore' is the king-pin of many a Christian's faith. As Dr Hely Almond, Headmaster of Loretto, once put it to some of his boys: 'Several hundred people were so sure they had seen Him after He had risen (1 Corinthians 15⁶) that the belief was the centre and moving power of their lives. . . . If you grip this truth and make it the centre of your lives, you may leave all questions of doctrines, etc., as open questions. Just be always reminding yourselves, "But I know that Jesus rose and lives".'

The despair of the twelve was deeper than the feeling that Jesus was nothing more, after all, than a martyred idealist; they were crushed by a deep sense of personal failure. We must try to recapture the emotions with which

these men received the women's announcement that they would presently be confronted by the Risen Jesus (Mark 16⁷). By their wholesale desertion they were all implicated in Peter's denial. If Jesus was coming among them, what could they expect from the Master they had abandoned in His most terrible hour—condemnation and a contemptuous dismissal? The significance of Jesus' greeting for the hiding disciples must not be overlooked—'Peace be unto you' (John 20¹⁹). What a soul-reviving, reassuring word it was to these self-tortured, self-condemning men! This word of peace contained forgiveness, for they could not possibly be at peace with Him unless He had forgiven all. Amongst the foremost meanings of the Resurrection for us is this offer of pardon. 'Let us grasp the fact that we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ' (Romans 5¹).¹⁴ This does not merely mean relief from being scolded by God; we, whose sin would sever us from God, know by His pardoning word that we are accepted back into His fellowship. Our Lord's return from death has brought healing to men.

(b) *He rose to exhibit that His purpose was accomplished.* This leads to the relation of the Resurrection to the Crucifixion: on Easter Day the seeming defeat of the Cross was transformed into triumph.

The victory of the Cross lay in the fact that sin was unable to break Jesus. Although they reached the extremity of evil in their treatment of Him, Jesus loved men to the end. Thus He outfaced and broke the power of sin. All this would, of course, have been true if from the Cross His spirit had taken its flight to heaven and He had returned to His Father's throne without being seen again of men. But since we should not have known, how could we have responded in loving faith to the saving fact of the Cross?

¹⁴ J. B. Phillips's translation.

But for the Resurrection, we should read the Cross primarily as the victimization of the Crucified. Our foremost impression would be of the brave and dignified endurance of Jesus, and the highest value we could salvage would be the supreme example of loyalty He showed to what He conceived to be God's will. We should be left with the sad reflection, as we are when we read of Socrates' death, that mankind destroys its noblest sons, and at best we should gratefully acknowledge the moral influence of His martyrdom.

In the light of the Resurrection we see that Jesus was no passive victim, that it was 'for the joy set before Him, He endured the Cross despising the shame' (Hebrews 12²). This 'joy' was in the most extensive sense a 'shared' joy; He died that He might say to many: 'Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.' Jesus' death was purposive; it aimed at flinging wide the gates that all who respond to the mercy of God may enter His Kingdom of marvellous light. The Resurrection reveals the *positive* motive of the Cross and shows it to be a signal victory.

Dr William Paton has written: 'The Resurrection fulfilled and completed what was done on the Cross, it did not annul it. The Risen Lord is still a crucified one. The joy of the first Easter was not the joy of those who wake from a nightmare and thank God that after all it wasn't true and didn't happen. It did happen, and because it happened it was not possible that death should be the end.'¹⁵

(c) *He arose to show Himself in His true light.* The disciples learned on Easter Day that they were not just left with the memory of a dear friend; they were to walk in fellowship with a living Lord.

The atmosphere of the Resurrection story, centred in One who had returned from the grave, might easily

¹⁵ *World Community* (SCM, 1938), p. 47.

have been 'out of this world', bordering on the eerie. Instead, one is impressed with its human warmth. Jesus takes up again the old gracious relationship with His friends. Though He was the Risen Lord, He spoke to them in the tones they had known and loved so well. Mary, for instance, recognized Him by the familiarity of His voice as He spoke her name, and at once she was back upon the old intimate footing. Adoringly she exclaimed: 'Rabboni!' (John 20¹¹⁻¹⁸).

Yet the Risen Christ impressed His disciples with a new glory. The name that naturally came to their lips was 'Lord', and Thomas is eventually brought to his knees with the confession: 'My Lord and my God!' (John 20²⁸). Now they saw Him as He was. It was true that He was to them all He had been before the crucifixion—but He was more. They could again lean heavily upon His strength; but now they realized how majestic was that strength. They could again share the largeness of His heart and mind; but now they began to feel His infinite nature. Once more He would lead them to that depth of spiritual discernment where truth became clear; and now they saw why. Now they understood why His nearness drew them close to God. There was a new glory about Him that hushed their voices as they whispered: 'It is the Lord!'

There is a meaning deeper than the one which lies on the surface in the words: 'Jesus manifested Himself to the disciples' (John 21¹). Through Jesus' self-revelation the disciples perceived the divine glory of His Person and were able to pass on to the Church its earliest Creed: 'Jesus is Lord.' It is still the light of His Resurrection that reveals the Lordship of Jesus in its fullness to the Christian of today.

(d) *He arose to assure us of immortality.* The Apostle Paul explicitly bases his argument for personal immortality

upon the Resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15¹²⁻¹⁴). That there is a life after death is proved, he maintained, by the fact that Jesus returned from the grave and, still more significant, by the fact that His defeat of sin had withdrawn death's sting.

The Christian religion's assurance of life after death is centred in the Risen Christ. Other arguments are valued as confirming the evidence of Christ's Resurrection, but that is the ground of our sure hope. Thus at a funeral service the minister does not develop Platonic, or any other, theories, but firmly pronounces the words of Scripture. 'I am the resurrection, and the Life; He that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die' (John 11²⁵⁻⁶). 'Because I live, ye shall live also' (John 14¹⁹).

Because the Christian hope is focused upon the Risen Christ, we are assured of more than the mere fact of survival; we have here the guarantee of the quality of the life beyond the grave. Christ's rising is witness not merely to everlasting life, but to *eternal* life. Our future is to be shared with Him; therefore it will be a radiant life and in the fullest sense a satisfying life. It will take its quality from His fellowship. Christians grope to find a word sufficiently deep and expansive to express the richness of that life. They cannot find a better word than the New Testament expression, 'glory'.

*Eye cannot see, nor heart conceive,
The glory there.*

(e) *He returned to establish His Church.* One of the ancient symbols used to depict the Church is that of a ship, and if we follow this analogy we may say that Jesus laid the Church's keel during His life and completed its building at the Resurrection. God launched the craft on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

As, before His death, Jesus looked forward, He very deliberately set out to bind 'His own' into a close fellowship. The fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth chapters of the Gospel of St John are proof not only of this, but of the fact that Jesus was planning a *continuing* fellowship that was to exist in life relationship with Himself. After His Resurrection it becomes plain that this society is under orders; its commission is to win others. 'Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost' (Matthew 28¹⁹). To read objectively the Apostle Paul's development of the doctrine of the Church is to realize that he has taken up the threads of Jesus' design. He has elaborated what was in the mind of Jesus when He founded His abiding and expanding fellowship.

Jesus' appearance after death played an essential part in the establishment of His Church. It is illogical to imagine that the leap could have been made from the atmosphere of Good Friday to the vital experience and stirring events of the day of Pentecost. When 'Jesus stood in the midst' (John 20²⁶), He was once again the unifying centre of their fellowship and the little society that had been on the verge of disintegration became 'one' more firmly than ever. The enterprise of the Kingdom, instead of being a dead cause, opened up with greater hope and challenge. The Church was ready, waiting for the motive force that would empower it at Pentecost—the gift of the Holy Spirit.

III. 'THE CROWNED LORD OF ALL'

(I) *The Ascension in the light of modern knowledge*

The difficulty has not been resolved in many a mind of reconciling the New Testament picture of Jesus ascending into heaven with the fact that modern astronomy has exploded the idea of heaven being located 'up above'.

The Evangelist Luke records the story of the Ascension in Luke 24^{53f} and Acts 1^{6f}. A few expositors have seized upon the vagueness of language in these two accounts. Luke 24⁵¹ merely records 'He departed from them and was carried up into heaven'. Moreover, some doubt may be cast upon the latter part of this sentence by the fact that it is omitted from a few ancient manuscripts. Acts merely records that as His disciples were looking, 'He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight'. It is argued by these expositors that Jesus simply ascended the hillside and was lost to the disciples' sight in the mist.

There is another possible explanation. The disciples accepted the cosmology current in their day; for them heaven was 'up there'. The fact that Jesus was resuming His glory as the Eternal Son of God had to be demonstrated to them. It may, therefore, be that Jesus was lifted bodily from the earth to bring home to them the truth that He was returning to His Father's throne. Whether in fact levitation of the human body has ever occurred, the possibility of this happening would not be ruled out by modern physics. For that matter, the New Testament does not suggest that Christ's body ascended by virtue of its own buoyancy; Luke says He 'was *carried* up' and Acts that He 'was *taken* up' (the root word is the same in the Greek). If the phenomenon is regarded as accommodating the disciples' mental outlook, the traditional view of the Ascension can still be held alongside the modern view of the universe. The truth was being demonstrated in the only terms the disciples could understand.

Of course, if the view is accepted that the Resurrection appearances of Jesus were in fact visions apprehended by faith,¹⁶ the difficulties respecting the Ascension disappear.

¹⁶ See above, p. 95.

Here we have a further visionary experience of the faithful.

The demythologizing movement. This is a convenient place for taking a passing glance at a movement now gaining ground in theological circles—the 'Demythologizing Movement'. This School maintains that in the New Testament the Christian Gospel is presented in the clothing of myth. The story of the Ascension provides a good example. The meaning embodied in the accounts provided at the end of Luke and at the beginning of the Acts is presented 'in terms of the contemporary mythological conception of the world' which derived from Gnosticism and Jewish Apocalyptic. This was appropriate for the first Christian generation because this was the thought-form of that age. But since the three-decker conception of the universe is no longer tenable, the account must now be demythologized in order to get at its interior truth, and this must be re-presented to this generation in terms appropriate to *our* age.

The 'demythologizers' say that when the narrators interpret events, although they appear to be reporting what happened in the exterior world, they are in fact describing their own interior experience. When, for instance, the writer of Acts attributes the demented man's onslaught on the seven sons of Sceva to the action of a demon (Acts 19¹³⁻¹⁶), what he is really doing is testifying to his awareness that his life (like all human life) is 'limited, conditioned, and frustrated by factors beyond his control'.

Different scholars of this persuasion would draw the border-line between myth and actuality at different points. Some would accept certain miracles of Jesus as factual (e.g. the healing of the paralytic youth—Mark 2¹⁻¹²) and others as mythological (e.g. Christ walking on the water—Mark 6⁴⁵⁻⁵²). Such a view does, of course, remove

many difficulties for the modern mind in its approach to the Gospel narratives. Bultmann, the leading protagonist of this movement, extends the area of myth very widely indeed, but one would not need to go all the way with the extremists to use their basic principle as a guide for the interpretation of certain primitive elements in the New Testament writings. A clear outline of this theory is provided in Ian Henderson's *Myth in the New Testament* (SCM).

(2) *The meaning of the Ascension*

The significance of any event, however, is the meaning it contains. The New Testament records the Ascension as a historical event; yet, while it is indeed desirable to find an explanation of it satisfying to our intelligence, that is not the all-important point. Even the conclusion that the story is simply pious legend would not be finally destructive. If the *meaning* in the story abides, then the doctrine of the Ascension remains unshaken. What significance does the event contain?

(a) *The Son of God resumes His glory.* First, Jesus Christ has resumed the glory He had with the Father 'before the world was' (John 17⁶). As the Creeds put it, He is now 'seated on the right hand of God'. Not only does this place in its eternal context our Lord's earthly career, affirming that He who trod our path before us is the very Son of God; it also gives us the blessed assurance that love is on the throne of the universe. For He who rules on high is the Jesus whose life of love we can trace in the pages of the Gospels, who spent Himself for men, to the point of dying for them. Knowing that it is in unity with the Father and the Holy Spirit that He reigns, we can live in complete confidence that the Providence ordering our lives is guiding them with a loving and righteous purpose. Our lives are in Good Hands; they are being shaped toward a great and glorious end.

The doctrine of the Ascension declares the Exalted Christ to be 'King of Kings and Lord of Lords' (Revelation 19¹⁶). He is on the Throne. Since 'all authority has been given to Him in heaven and on earth', we are assured not only that He wills our eternal good, but also that He is able to accomplish it. The Lord who reigns on high is the Christ who triumphed over sin and death. He ever lives to give us the victory, the great helper of all who put their trust in Him. This power to accomplish His purpose operates not only in our personal lives, but also on the larger stage of world history.¹⁷ Of all people, the Christian can live in good heart today; for he knows that 'Jesus is on the Throne'.

(b) *Jesus has taken our manhood above.* Another great truth is embodied in the doctrine of the Ascension: Jesus has taken our manhood above. The Lord who was born true man rose from death still truly man and ascended with our humanity to the Father. This truth is vitally important for several reasons.

We know that because He is identified with us in our humanity, He has perfect sympathy with us. Isaac Watts's paraphrase of Hebrews 4¹⁵ expresses this point beautifully:

*Touched with a sympathy within,
He knows our feeble frame;
He knows what sore temptations mean,
For He hath felt the same.*

He knows. What encouragement it provides us Christians to realize the perfect sympathy there is for us in the heart of God, that He who sits upon the throne 'is one of us'! When we feel cast down, even when others are not able to enter into our inmost feeling, we have the assurance that Jesus, the Eternal, understands. He is close to

¹⁷ See above, pp. 46-8.

us in love. There is nothing that it is impossible to share with Him, for He has travelled the whole length of our human experience. ' . . . Countless believers have confessed a deep sense of Christ's perfect sympathy with their need and pain and joy. Not only so, they have been conscious of a deep sympathy with Him.'¹⁸ He is still our kinsman and there is a perfect sympathy of experience between His life and ours.

(c) *The ascended Jesus presents our humanity to God.* Then Jesus presents our humanity in perfect obedience to God, for in Him Ideal Man stands before God. The writer to the Hebrews is the pioneer of the daring thought that through His earthly career Jesus *attained* to perfect manhood. By His obedience and suffering He consummated our humanity (Hebrews 5⁸) and brought it to God. In this sense 'He pleads our cause with God'. This scriptural and theological expression has often been misinterpreted. It does not mean that with His appeals on our behalf, Jesus influences a God who would otherwise be frigidly affronted or wrathfully opposed to us. In making us for fellowship with Himself, God gave us a humanity which was capable of being fitted for such communion (see Genesis 1²⁶, 2⁷). Jesus pleads the truth of this by presenting our humanity in its perfection and *as Man* responding to the Love of God. He also voices our penitence before the Throne; Himself sinless, He speaks as He alone can for His sinful race. He offers the fruits of His redemptive ministry. By this He has destroyed sin's power over man; grace is now at work in man, that in newness of life he may grow toward 'the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ'. He offers restored humanity to God—the new man capable of entering into divine fellowship (see 2 Peter 1⁴).

¹⁸ H. R. Mackintosh, *The Person of Jesus Christ* (T. & T. Clark, 1937), p. 395.

(d) *Jesus represents our humanity before God.* From time to time throughout the Christian ages stress has been given to the representative function of our Lord at His Father's Throne. The writer to the Hebrews used the analogy of the High Priest in Jewish ritual (7²⁶-8²). When the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, he went into the Presence, not merely as himself, but as representing the whole people. The nation was focused in him. Through Him the tribes crept into the Presence of God. In Hebrews the Ascended Christ is the Great High Priest of mankind, who, 'when he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God' (10¹²). 'He is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them' (7²⁵). In the second century Irenaeus¹⁹ took up this idea and developed it in his 'recapitulation theory'. Christ, he maintained, experienced every stage of human life and every human emotion in order to bring humanity to God. He comprises, or sums up in Himself, all humanity, including the generations that had preceded His birth.

In modern times the growing appreciation of humanity's oneness—the fact of 'racial solidarity'—has again brought this aspect of the doctrine of the Ascension into the light. In the Exalted Christ, at the very Throne, we have the focal point of our fellowship with God. Jesus did not shed His humanity on ascending into heaven. The God-man relationship is secured in Him for ever. In Him man is fully answering God's Fatherly demands with a filial response.

(3) *Our Lord's place in history*

Future generations, assessing the theology of our day, may very probably pick out the present stress upon the

¹⁹ c. AD 130-200, Bishop of Lyons.

relevance of Jesus to history as its distinctive contribution. For instance, in the *Report from the World Council of Churches at Evanston* (1954), the Section on Social Responsibility opens with the statement: 'Christian social responsibility is grounded in the mighty acts of God, who is revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord. He has created the world, and all time is embraced within His eternal purpose. He moves and acts within history as the ever-living God. The centre of world history is the earthly life, the Cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. . . . In Him God entered history decisively, to judge and to forgive. In Him are revealed the present plight of man, and the end toward which the world is moving.'

'Christ the key to history' is the theme of the later writings of St Paul, but in course of time this aspect of our Lord's function became largely obscured by theology's concentration upon individual salvation. Interest has now fastened again upon the historical significance of Jesus. Reinhold Niebuhr's is a typical modern definition of Jesus Christ: 'The disclosure of the character of God and the meaning of history.' Again, this emphasis has been well expressed by William Paton: 'History, as Tillich says, has a centre. It is not merely that what happened in that little room and on the hill outside has had manifold effects among people ever since; that is true, but it is true also in some measure of the death of Socrates. No, this fact is in the Christian view, the centre of history because from this centre history derives its meaning. A new age had dawned.'²⁰

F. R. Barry has pointed out that 'calling Jesus "Christ" was, for a Jew, the equivalent of saying that history takes its significance from Him'.²¹ The modern study of St Paul has brought into clearer light the far-reaching

²⁰ *World Community* (SCM, 1938), p. 45.

²¹ *A Philosophy from Prison* (SCM, 1940), p. 78.

significance of Jesus' Messiahship. In fulfilling his God-appointed place (the key role) for the bringing in of the Kingdom of God, Jesus Christ has let loose in this world a new power, 'the agape (love) of the Kingdom of God as a resource for infinite developments toward a more perfect brotherhood in history'.²²

The great truth that breaks in upon this world in Jesus is that God is at work in His world. He is now engaged in the work of the redemption of mankind. The kingdom, though it is to be consummated in the future, is here now. The fact that God is actively at work is the supreme factor in history, and any interpretation that leaves it out is sadly incomplete; such an interpretation must run either to shallow optimism or unrelieved despair. In Jesus Christ 'the revelation is final . . . the right direction of human history is now known. We know that God's purpose is redemptive. The way of salvation is known. It is through the Person and Work of Christ, alive and active in His world today.'²³

(4) *The End in view*

History unfolds toward its God-appointed End. That is not to say that we are to picture this process as an automatic development, as smooth and inevitable as the dawning of day. Even those modern scholars who are not wholeheartedly devoted to the 'Theology of Crisis' do not deny that it represents one true angle of approach. Evil is potent in the world and the holy Love of God is matched against it. The battle is joined. The purpose of God is being achieved through a series of crises rather than by a smooth upward growth. God is not standing aside watching His purpose gradually ripen. He is 'taking a hand' in world events. The entrance of His Son into history, and

²² Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (Nisbet, 1946), II.89.

²³ *The Missionary Obligation of the Church* (Epworth Press, 1955), p. 17.

that Son's combat with evil culminating in the Cross, is His master stroke.

On the lips of theologians the phrase 'the End' is not given the mere sense of finality. The dominating idea is not the fall of the curtain upon the drama of history; it is rather that of God's purposes coming to fruition—the meaning of history coming true. The thought of the Son of Man coming in His glory gives us a picture of the Kingdom consummated and God entering fully into His own. No great amount of reflection is needed to see the reasonableness of this idea. The more one thinks of it the more apparent it must become that there must be an 'End' to history. If 'God is working His purpose out', it is only reasonable to suppose that there must be a point somewhere in the future when He will reach His goal. Manifestly, Christian theology would be incomplete without the doctrine of the Second Coming, and it is firmly entrenched in New Testament teaching. 'Then cometh the end, when he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have abolished all rule and all authority and power' (1 Corinthians 15²⁴). The Christian Church has ever looked forward joyfully to the day when, 'in the name of Jesus every knee [shall] bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, and . . . every tongue . . . confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father' (Philippians 2¹⁰⁻¹¹).

In this, the Church has firm authority, for this eschatological²⁴ note was sounded clearly by our Lord (e.g. Mark 13²⁴⁻⁷). The whole question of Jesus' attitude to apocalyptic²⁵ is a very involved one and into it we cannot

²⁴ 'Concerning the End'—'*eschatos*' being Greek for 'end'.

²⁵ A stream of Hebrew thought present in certain prophets and other literature which interpreted the coming of the Kingdom in terms of crisis (the expression comes from the Greek word 'to reveal', 'to disclose'). The last book of the Bible, 'The Apocalypse of St John', translated 'Revelation' is in this stream.

enter, but we can accept as a minimum statement that He looked forward to a point in history when God's great purpose would come to full realization—His Kingdom would come. 'And then shall they see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.'

Today many scholars accept the view that the idea of a catastrophic divine intervention was an inheritance from Judaism and that the notion was particularly in vogue immediately before, and at the beginning of, the Christian era. The strength of this conception at that time has recently been confirmed by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls; for they show that the Qumrân Community had withdrawn to its desert monastery to maintain the true faith 'during the present period of apostasy until the end of the age and the coming of the Kingdom of God'.²⁶ Early Christian thought, it is maintained, naturally became coloured by this prevailing theological concept, but the idea is not integral to the Christian faith. F. R. Barry²⁷ argues that as Paul's theology matures, this expectation inevitably recedes. 'It is part and parcel of those Jewish thought-forms which, *ex-hypothesi*, have been outgrown.' 'For once you have reached the point of seeing Jesus as the instrument of a universal purpose and of knowing Him as a Presence in the heart, there is really no more room for the Parousia.'²⁸

The crown of this outgrowing process, it is claimed, is seen in the Fourth Gospel. The essential thing to John, declares Bultmann,²⁹ is that Jesus is the Eschatological Figure. His coming and going, which are a unity, is the eschatological event—'the judgement of the world'; 'the eschatological salvation-event is already taking place in

²⁶ See *Second Thoughts on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, F. F. Bruce (Paternoster Press, 1956).

²⁷ *A Philosophy from Prison*, p. 78.

²⁸ 'The coming'—i.e. the future Advent of Christ.

²⁹ *Theology of the New Testament* (SCM, 1955), Vol. II.

the present'. This interpretation³⁰ is clearly presented by William Temple in his *Readings in St John's Gospel*. 'Jesus speaks repeatedly of His coming as imminent; there is nothing said about a Second Coming, though there is truth in the expectation so expressed. But the Lord speaks only of the Coming of the Son of Man. Before the High Priest He declares that this is now a present fact. "From henceforth there shall be the Son of Man seated on the right hand of God and coming in the clouds of heaven" (St Luke 22⁶⁹). . . . Daniel's prophecy, He claims, is then and there fulfilled. In power the Kingdom was established when Christ was lifted up upon the Cross. From that moment it is true that "He cometh with clouds" . . .' (p. 31). The Coming of the Holy Spirit and His expanding work continue the eschatological event.

This interpretation of eschatology does not, of course, dispose of the conception of the consummation of the Kingdom, for as Temple puts it, 'not all have eyes to perceive, and the time when "every eye shall see Him" is still future, and this is the truth in the expectation of a Return or Second Coming'.

We have now been led back to the subject of 'the Son of Man'.

(5) '*The Son of Man*'

This is the title most frequently on the lips of Jesus and it has generally been assumed that in using it Jesus was referring to Himself. (A recent theory that modifies this view is mentioned at the end of this section.) An idea of the title's meaning in our Lord's day can be gathered from the account of Jesus' examination by 'the chief priests, elders and scribes' recorded in Mark 14^{53ff} (Matthew 26^{57ff}) and Luke 22^{66ff}. According to Mark, Jesus was asked, 'Art thou the Christ, the Son of the

³⁰ Often called 'Realized Eschatology'.

Blessed?' and Jesus replied: 'I am: and ye shall see *the Son of Man* sitting at the right hand of power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.' Luke tell us that this reply immediately prompted the question; 'Art thou then the *Son of God?*' In both accounts His claim was accounted blasphemy.

This points to the fact that there was more in this title than appeared on the surface; it did not merely refer to the humanity of its holder. There is a hint that the title has a history. In fact the development of its meaning can be traced in Jewish writings. A specialized meaning is first traceable in Daniel (early second century B C) where in 7¹³ 'one like unto a son of man' comes to rule over the fifth and last kingdom after the rule of the four beasts had each in turn been destroyed. Here it would appear that 'son of man' refers either to the saints of Israel or some true Israelitish king to be. By the time the Book of Enoch is reached (later in the same century), the picture has become more vivid; the Son of Man has grown into a super-human, pre-existent being who has been kept by God to judge angels and men and to reign in glory for ever.

We must bear in mind the role of the Son of Man to get the clue to the meaning of the title on Jesus' lips. The Son of Man, descending from a pre-existent glory, occupies the central role, and is given the decisive function, in the bringing in of the Kingdom of God. He stands in a unique relationship to God and yet has close affinities with the human race. Jesus preferred this title to 'Messiah' because it had not become identified (as the latter had) with the political dreams of nationalist partisans. Some of the notions that had attached themselves to the conception of the Messiah were crudely materialistic and Jesus firmly resisted the attempts to adopt Him as a political leader. Thus, when Peter made his confession at Caesarea Philippi (Mark 8²⁷; parallel accounts, Matthew 16^{13ff}, Luke 9^{18ff}),

while Jesus accepted Peter's acknowledgement, 'Thou art the Christ',³¹ He at once returned to His own choice of title, 'Son of Man'.

This conversation at Caesarea Philippi is significant for another reason: Jesus there presented a new and startling picture of the Son of Man. 'And He began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders, and the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.' (Mark 8³¹). Jesus blends the idea of the Son of Man with the character of the Suffering Servant described in the sublime 'Servant Songs' in the Book of Isaiah.³² Jesus' teaching contrasts strikingly with the notion then current of the coming of the Son of Man; He still expects Him to wield power—not, however, a warrior's might, but the power of redemptive suffering. 'He teaches that in Himself the Son of Man has come, that in His frailty He already wields the authority of God, that by death He will triumph and save, and that He will return to judge and rule.'³³ In a word, He gave the conception of the Son of Man an altogether new ethical and spiritual depth.

An alternative view of Jesus' use of this title has been gaining ground in recent years. Professor T. W. Manson³⁴ contends that under the expression 'the Son of Man' Jesus re-echoes an idea found in the later Prophets³⁵ and hinted at in certain Psalms³⁶—the conception of a Righteous Remnant, a minority which when others fall away remains loyal to God.³⁷ The Suffering Servant in Isaiah may be

³¹ 'Christ' being the Greek translation of the Hebrew word 'Messiah'.

³² Isaiah 42¹⁻⁴, 49¹⁻⁶, 50⁴⁻⁹, 52¹³⁻⁵³12.

³³ C. Ryder Smith.

³⁴ *The Teaching of Jesus* (CUP, 1936). This theory's popularity may now have passed its peak. See *Jesus and His Church*, R. Newton Flew (1938), p. 75, and *Communion with God*, A. Raymond George, p. 103 (both Epworth Press).

³⁵ e.g. Isaiah 41⁸⁻¹¹, Micah 5³.

³⁶ e.g. 14⁵, 118²⁰.

³⁷ See H. H. Rowley, *Relevance of the Bible* (Clarke, 1941), p. 86: '... collective conception became individualized ... in the writers' own thought.'

this remnant. For Jesus, then, the Son of Man is identified with suffering; for the members of the Righteous Remnant live redemptively and sacrificially among their fellows. So Jesus planned to gather the righteous into a redemptive society entitled 'the Son of Man'. At first He looked for a large following, but in time His hope shrank to His disciples, and finally, on the Cross, the 'Remnant' dwindled to Himself alone. At Calvary the great redeeming sacrifice was made solely by our Lord. But here was initiated the new saving community that was to live on redemptively under the name of the Church.

If at first sight this theory appears startlingly novel, further consideration will show that it does not in any way detract from the significance of our Lord's Person, and that it is particularly attractive in the interpretation of the apocalyptic sayings of Jesus. Whether this exposition appeals to us as convincing or no, one thing is plain: the title 'Son of Man' has deeper content than the superficial meaning 'belonging to the human race'. At a minimum it asserts that our Lord occupies the prime place in God's plan for bringing in His Kingdom, it indicates the means by which the Kingdom is to be accomplished—the way of redemptive suffering—and it points forward to 'the End'—the Kingdom's consummation.

(6) *'Follow Me!'*

(a) *The call to service.* Christians are in no doubt when they sing Mrs Alexander's well-known hymn, 'Jesus calls us', that what they are singing is true. As surely as the Master's challenge 'Follow Me!' rang in Andrew's ears, so that call comes from a living Christ to us today. Jesus Christ is not merely a 'great life' of the past, or a teacher of a by-gone age who should be studied; He is a live Personality confronting us in our situation with His call.

Jesus appeals to men to 'lose their lives' for His sake.

He offers Himself as the inspiration of Christian discipleship, so that the basis of His follower's service is devotion to Him. It is this motive ('serving the Lord') that gives distinctiveness to Christian Service. Those whom the Christian seeks to help may prove ungrateful, indifferent, or even hostile, but a motive deeper than their appreciation sustains the disciple—his love for his Lord.

The fully committed Christian sees the world's condition in the light of Christ's redeeming Passion. He has no doubt that the Lord's 'Follow Me!' is a call to service—costing service. Would that we all had the same degree of sensitiveness to social evil that G. A. Studdert Kennedy had! But even if we do not all have it in the same measure, we must have been awakened to some extent by Christ's challenge. If we have not, it is in grave doubt whether we have obeyed the Master's voice at all. In the 'twenties' Kennedy used to witness to a personal experience that contributed deeply to his flaming zeal for social righteousness. 'During the first World War', it is recorded, 'Kennedy stumbled over the dead body of a German, a mere boy, and as he looked and thought, the boy seemed to disappear and in his place lay Christ upon the Cross, saying: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my little ones ye have done it unto Me." And Kennedy cried with passionate sincerity: "From that moment on I never saw a battle-field as anything but a crucifix. I have never seen the world as anything but a crucifix. I see the Cross set up in every slum, in every filthy over-crowded quarter, in every vulgar, flaring street that speaks of luxury and the waste of life. I see Him staring up at me from the pages of a newspaper that tells of a tortured, lost, bewildered world. . . . And on that Cross my God still hangs and calls on all brave men and women to come out, and share His sorrow and help to save the world.' '

(b) *The disciple can count upon the resources of Christ.* But Jesus' 'Follow Me' not only places an obligation upon us; it also brings all His resources into our lives. Mark explains Jesus' call of the Twelve very simply: it was 'that they might be with Him, and that he might send them forth to preach' (3¹⁴). The Apostles' power to evangelize and to do the works of Christ derived from His Presence with them. There was the secret of their strength. Matthew records as the Lord's last promise to them: 'Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end' (28²⁰). Following Jesus means 'being with Him' and sharing the resources of His divine nature. 'I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me,' cries Paul; '... And my God shall fulfil every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus' (Philippians 4^{13, 19}).

This promise has been proved by Christians in every age. Nearly a hundred years ago two missionaries, David Hill and William Scarborough, braved the hostility blazing against foreigners, to carry the Gospel into Central China. They travelled two hundred miles down the Yangtze and crossed the river to Huangchow Fu. There they had a violent reception. Stones began to fly. The missionaries were jostled, hustled, and kicked. A very ugly situation developed. Yet the two men persisted. Outside the city they stood up and preached, and David Hill describes the exaltation of spirit that possessed him: 'For the people listened most eagerly and the Lord helped me as I had not been helped all the time before. I felt He was there and stilled the violence of the people.'

We need not go back even a hundred years for evidence of the reliability of Christ's promise. When the Mau Mau terror was at its height recently in Kenya, a Kikuyu pastor and his wife were beaten and maltreated with knives in the presence of their family. Their tormentors threatened to kill their children. Yet a great peace possessed

these simple Christians. Their anxiety was for their assailants! They prayed for them and pleaded with them to throw themselves upon the mercy of God. The faithful pastor still cannot explain why their lives were spared, excepting in these terms: 'We were sure it was the Lord's work and that He alone had saved us from death.' 'What amazed us and set us praising God was that all the time we were beaten and hacked we felt no pain, nor did we show any sign of grief or despair.'³⁸ Because they drew upon the resources of Christ's power, these Kikuyu Christians were able to brave a situation that would have strained human resistance beyond breaking-point.

The normal situations a Christian meets are not so extreme as those we have instanced, yet if he accepts the full responsibilities of Christian discipleship, both in his own personal life and in his service, he will need a strength beyond his own. Fellowship with the Living Christ assures us of His Present Power. 'The power to do all these things is assuredly given us in Christ, who strengtheneth us.'³⁹

(c) *Following Christ means belonging to His Church.* When Jesus called Nathaniel 'to be with Him', He called him into the circle of His company. Nathaniel became part of the fellowship that had the Lord as its life-source and centre. On the one hand, it would be difficult for us to over-state what it meant to the individual disciple to 'belong'; on the other, the effectiveness of the individual's service was immeasurably increased because he was united to that 'one working band'. The impact of that society was infinitely greater than the sum total of the individual contributions of the several members.

After the first Easter and Whitsunday, that society, still with Christ as its living Head, expanded immeasurably

³⁸ Reported in the *British Weekly* (1955).

³⁹ The Covenant Service of the Methodist Church.

in its life and work, and its growth has continued. Today, as the Church, it lives on, the Body in which the Spirit of Christ is incarnate in the world. When Jesus calls us, He still calls us into the circle of His own, and discipleship means taking our place in His Church. The ministries and fellowship of the Church are essential to our Christian life. There are vital streams of grace that reach us only through the Church. We also share in the obligations of the Redeemed Society. The call of Christ to His Church is *our* call. The conception of the 'solitary Christian'—the 'lone hand'—is contrary to New Testament teaching and to the realities of experience. It is both a mighty privilege and a solemn responsibility to be 'very members incorporate in the mystical Body of God's Son, which is the blessed company of all faithful people'.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ The Service of Holy Communion.

Epilogue

IN the foregoing pages the reader has more than once been reminded that the study of Christology, like any other worth-while adventure, involves risks. Not the least of these is that in making Jesus the subject of research we should lose our sense of Him as a real Person—the living Presence in our lives. Then, too, in dealing familiarly with the awesome marvel of the Incarnation, we run a risk of ‘losing the wonder in the analysis’. In our final thought let us lift our minds from the problems which beset us and rest our eyes simply upon Him. Fundamentally, the impression Jesus makes today is that which He made upon the people of the first century. Let us view Him, then, from our common standpoint.

‘And the common people heard Him gladly’ (Mark 12³⁷). One reason why we enjoy reading the narrative of the Gospels is that, like the men and women of His own day, we feel ‘at home’ in Jesus’ company. With good reason Julian of Norwich calls Him ‘the homely Lord’. How approachable He is! His naturalness invites the friendship of plain people. This is true of the Risen Christ no less than the Jesus of Nazareth. No homelier narrative can be found than the story of the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24¹³). It was the companionableness of ‘the Stranger’ that warmed the disciples’ hearts and made them share their deepest confidences with Him, and it came naturally to them to offer Him the hospitality of their humble dwelling. With His own, the fellowship of Jesus became an intimacy unparalleled—a union of spirit no man could describe. They *belonged* to Him as a branch belongs to the Vine. ‘Abide in me and I in you.’

How His friends came to know that experience! Jesus' nearness means more than just His being present; He is *close* to us—close in kinship, close in love, in strength, in understanding.

'I am His and He is mine!'

Let the mind linger on this thought. What peculiarly precious meaning it has when applied to Jesus! He is ours in a different sense, in a unique intimacy of love and understanding, in a way no other can be ours, not even our dearest. By virtue of His perfect manhood (the Personality which answers to all that is deepest and best within us) and His divine nature of inexhaustible love, He gets home even to the hidden corners of the soul.

'Lord to whom [else] should we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life' (John 6⁶⁸). So felt His disciples about Him and so we feel about Him. Our hope is grounded in this homely Jesus. To look upon Him is to gain the life-giving assurance, 'He is able'; for He is none other than the strong Son of God. He can deal with our inmost problem—the problem of the distorted soul, the twist that turns us in upon ourselves, the haunting, gnawing problem of human sin. He met this evil upon the battle ground of the Cross and He brings the fruits of victory into our lives. He mediates God's forgiveness, restoring our souls with His redeeming touch. He is able too, to keep the soul—to sustain it in temptation and amid the strain and stress of a wearing life. He satisfies the yearnings of the best within us, and it is in closer, dearer company with Him that we grow in spirit.

'The light of the knowledge of the glory of God [is given] in the face of Jesus Christ' (2 Corinthians 4⁶). He brings God to us. He bring us to God. As it was true of Jesus' companions in the flesh, that they who were most at home with Him experienced most profoundly the sense

of awe His majesty provokes (e.g. Mark 4⁴¹, Luke 5⁸), so it is true today; they who love Him most deeply fall down in adoring worship before Him. The glory of God is upon His face. The glory of the Creator is there, the Eternal, the Lord of Earth and Skies; yet were that all, the effect of His greatness would be that we should shrink from Him. He has shown us God's glory in its other aspect—the majesty of His divine simplicity, the greatness by which He can become our Friend, the greatness which submits to suffering, even the sacrifice of the Cross. 'Friend of sinners'—He has no dearer name than this. What warmth there is in His welcome! The glory on His face is the strong, true love of God—not a greatness that thrusts us away, but a greatness that draws us to Him.

But we cannot finish with Jesus there. He is not just a benefactor to be 'dealt with' merely by accepting or declining His favours as we will. His presence is a challenge we cannot evade; it calls us personally to answer for our attitude to Him. If we refuse Him, we reject the divine purpose of our lives, we turn our backs upon our true meaning and end, we set ourselves at conflict with God's whole design. Our response to Christ's call is not a passing phase; it concerns an eternal issue. Like the rich ruler (Mark 10^{17ff}), we see Him standing in our path confronting us with a challenge we cannot evade: 'Venture all and follow me.' There can be no half dealings with this Jesus. 'He asks for the human heart; He will have it entirely to Himself. He asks it unconditionally. . . .' It is those who submit to His call and give Him their lives who find for the first time that they possess their lives.

*My will is not my own
Till Thou hast made it Thine.*

This is life eternal—to know Him, to know Him in the unity of life which is brought through surrender to His love.

The challenge that Jesus gives is wider than that, however; for He calls us to take our place in the ranks of God's Kingdom. That means making the plans of the Kingdom our aim. His 'follow me' is a call to consecrate ourselves to His service. He sets before us the vision of His Kingdom, the vision of a redeemed humanity in life-relationship with God. It is a world-wide conception, gathering 'all lands, all peoples, all the earth' into its scope. It looks for the redemption of every part of this world's life—social, political, industrial, indeed all human institutions. God went to the length of coming down to this life of ours that this purpose might be fulfilled. Here is a fact sufficient in itself to assure us of the worth-while-ness of this great cause. It *must* commend itself to our enthusiasm, our devotion, our zeal. The task is vast; but we must remember the greatness of the Lord who leads. 'Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations. . . . lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end' (Matthew 28^{19, 20}).

Questionnaire for Private or Group Study

CHAPTER ONE

Section 1, pp. 17-22

- (1) Is it true that if Jesus is to remain 'the very centre of our new life', we must continually seek a clearer understanding of Him?
- (2) What point is there in this study of Jesus if His Personality is bound to out-reach our 'scanty thought'?
- (3) Is it really of consequence whether we regard Jesus as God come down to our humanity, or as a man of such spiritual quality that He has graduated into the Godhead?

Section 2, pp. 22-30

- (1) Illustrate how our doctrine of Christ has practical bearing upon our personal and corporate life.
- (2) Is it an over-statement that the Incarnation is the supreme truth upon which everything else hinges? Would it matter vitally if in our thought Jesus became but the best of men and in that sense the vehicle of God's Purpose?
- (3) Is there a danger of losing Jesus as a living and personal Friend by making Him a study-subject? How should we guard against this peril?

Section 3, pp. 30-4

- (1) X argues, 'If you believe in the basic decency of the human spirit and the principle of Good overcoming Evil, you do not need any doctrine of a Divine Redeemer.' Consider this point of view.

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PRIVATE OR GROUP STUDY 127

- (2) A modern song was criticized as 'pseudo-religious' on the grounds that, 'Anyone knows that it was by what happened on Good Friday, *not Christmas Day*, that we are saved'. Was the critic right?
- (3) 'God's grace in action.' Is that what Jesus means to you? How would you yourself describe what He is in your experience?
- (4) Is there a valuable vein of thought in the idea that Jesus made man's response to the love of God from within the human family?

Sections 4 & 5, pp. 34-48

- (1) This section outlines three theories of Jesus' awareness of His deity:
 - (a) at least at times Jesus knew He was Son of God;
 - (b) the fact was present in His subconscious;
 - (c) He cannot have been even intermittently aware of it. What is your view?
- (2) Is it true that ultimately it is on the level of personal experience that the deity of our Lord is established for us?
- (3) The Church's knowledge of Jesus' Godhead sprang from its post-Resurrection experience of the Living Lord; it was only afterwards that the full significance of His earthly life dawned upon the disciples. Discuss.
- (4) In the light of the examples given on pp. 41-2, assess the argument that Jesus' deity is confirmed by His power to arrest the human spirit today.
- (5) Do the following evidences provide good grounds for believing that Jesus is the Divine Lord?
 - (a) His ability to cope with our personal need.
 - (b) The spiritual force of His presence in the Church.

- (c) The power of His influence in the contemporary world.

CHAPTER TWO

Section 1, pp. 49-60

- (1) In the light of the transformation wrought by Jesus in individuals, society and history, the view that He is just a fictitious character becomes untenable. Review this argument.
- (2) 'He emptied Himself of *all* but love.' Did Jesus really go all the way in surrendering the prerogatives of Divine Sonship?
- (3) Is it true that a less than complete doctrine of divine self-emptying results in an unreal and untrue picture of Jesus?
- (4) Does the New Testament portray Jesus as normally and naturally human?

Section 2, pp. 60-6

- (1) A perfectly integrated personality drawing fully upon divine resources would exercise complete self-mastery over his physical and psychological nature. Does this reflection remove a whole set of problems relating to the sinlessness of Jesus?
- (2) Providing the essential truth of the Incarnation is accepted, opinion regarding the Virgin Birth is not a matter of vital concern. Agreed?

Section 3, pp. 66-79

- (1) If doubt were cast upon the belief that Jesus is truly our Brother, would our assurance of being received by God as His children be shaken?
- (2) Discuss how by becoming 'one of us', Jesus has given new value to our every-day life.

- (3) Consider what it means to us that 'God is expressed in full measure through Christ's perfect humanity'.
- (4) Consider the bearing of the statement that 'Christ has redeemed only as much of our humanity as He has assumed' upon the extent of the Incarnation.

CHAPTER THREE

Section 1, pp. 80-91

- (1) 'Atonement' is to be interpreted not as a legal or a ritual process, but as the healing of the relationship between the sinner and God. Is this true?
- (2) The meaning of the Cross lies in what forgiveness involves for God—not the overlooking of a fault but the reconciling of the sinner to Himself. Discuss.
- (3) Are *both* the Love *and* the Righteousness of God vindicated by the Cross?
- (4) What significance do you find in the fact that the New Testament does not speak of God being reconciled to man, but of man being reconciled to God?

Section 2, pp. 91-103

- (1) If it is accepted that through the Appearances of Christ God was declaring the victory of the Cross, nothing in the Resurrection story need prove an impediment to faith. Do you agree?
- (2) Ultimately it is the impression Jesus Himself makes on the soul that makes the Resurrection story credible to the believer. Is this true?
- (3) Do you agree that the Resurrection was *essential* to reveal that God's purpose had triumphed through the Cross and was not defeated by it, and that only so could Christians enter into the victory of the Cross?

- (4) The Resurrection still reveals the Lordship of Jesus today. Do you agree?
- (5) How does the Resurrection assure us of a *quality*-life beyond the grave?

Section 3, pp. 103-121

- (1) The meaning of the Ascension is not that Jesus is remote, but that He is enthroned. How does this affect us?
- (2) What difference does it make for us that the Ascended Jesus has taken our humanity with Him into heaven?
- (3) Has 'our Great High Priest' as a title for Jesus meaning for the Christian of today?
- (4) 'In Jesus Christ God personally entered history.' How does this affect prospects for the future?
- (5) Have we neglected the doctrine of 'the Last Things' in recent years, or do you think the subject too obscure for us to tackle?
- (6) Is the motive 'for love of Christ' in fact the main-spring of our service?
- (7) Do we habitually view the world's condition in the light of Christ's redeeming Passion? What difference would it make if we did? How can we train ourselves to do so?
- (8) Which thought is uppermost in our discipleship—what we do for the Master, or what the Master does for us; our giving out, or the resources available to us in Christ? Do we keep the right proportion?
- (9) Consider whether it is true that one cannot be 'in Christ' and deliberately remain outside His Church.

Index

- ADOPTIONISM, 20
 Almond, Hely, 98
 Apollinarius, 52
 Arius, 20, 27, 29, 53
 Ascension, 103-9
 Athanasius, 21
 Atonement, 38, 80-91, 99-100
 Augustine, 74

 BAILEY, JOHN, 95
 Barry, F. R., 110, 113
 Biology, issues raised by, 60, 63, 94
 Blunt, A. W. F., 86
 Brunner, Emil, 64
 Bultmann, R., 106, 113

 CALVIN, JOHN, 75
 Cave, Sidney, 48
 Celsus, 70
 Church, 17-20, 45, 49, 102-3, 117, 120-1
 Clement of Alexandria, 52
 Condescension of Son, 17-20
 Coulson, C. A., 23
 Cross, 80-91, 99-100
 Cyril of Alexandria, 53

 DEMYTHOLOGIZING MOVEMENT, 105
 Dependence of Jesus upon God, 68
 Docetists, 52

 EISENHOWER, PRESIDENT, 22
 Eschatology, 110-17
 Eutyches, 52
 Exalted Christ, 106-9

 FINDLAY, J. A., 36
 Fellowship, 33, 77, 86, 89, 108-9, 119-20
 Flynn, John, 47
 Foakes Jackson, F. J., 20
 Forgiveness, 84, 86, 99
 Forsyth, P. T., 36

 GANDHI, 46
 Glover, T. R., 69

 Grace of God, 27, 85-9
 Gregory of Nazianzus, 74
 Grensted, L. W., 33
 Gnosticism, 52

 HILL, DAVID, 119
 Historicity of Jesus, 50-1
 Hügel, Baron von, 82
 Hughes, Hugh Price, 44
 Humiliation of the Son, 17-20, 67-9

 IDENTIFICATION OF CHRIST WITH MAN, 68-73, 86, 88
 Incarnation, 19, 23-5, 49-79, 84-6
 Irenaeus, 109
 Ishii, Tokichi, 41

 JOAD, C. E. M., 23
 Julian of Norwich, 122

 KENNEDY, G. A. STUDDERT, 118

 LEWIS, C. S., 63
 Llewellyn, Richard, 31
 Logos, 21, 32
 Luther, Martin, 44, 50, 69, 75

 MACKINTOSH, H. R., 35, 64, 89, 97, 108
 MacLeod, George, 72
 Maltby, W. R., 86
 Manson, T. W., 116
 Morison, Frank, 97
 Müller, George, 76

 NEWMAN, JOHN HENRY, 79
 Nicene Creed, 17
 Niebuhr, Reinhold, 110, 111

 ORIGEN, 50, 70
 Original Sin, 26, 61

 PATON, WILLIAM, 100, 110
 Paul, the Apostle, 26, 54, 59, 72, 76, 77, 92, 101-3

- Personal nature of salvation, 33, 49,
 76-8, 84
 Peter, the Apostle, 40, 59
 Pre-existence of the Son, 17-19, 21,
 29, 30, 32, 106
 Proof, 37-8
 Psychological issues, 60-1
 Purpose, divine, 25, 97-8, 106

 RANSOM, 83
 Reality of Christ's manhood, 66-9,
 74-6
 Reconciliation, 33, 43, 85, 89-90,
 99-100
 Redemption, 83, 111, 116
 Relationship, divine-human, 33-4,
 42-3, 53, 89
 Relevance of Christianity today,
 22-8
 Restoration, 89, 99
 Resurrection, 91-103
 Retribution, 88
 Revelation, 19, 32-3, 38-9, 73-4
 Representative Man, 75, 85, 108-9
 Robinson, T. H., 65

 SACRIFICE, 83
 Salvation, 76-9, 83
 Satisfaction theory, 87
 Second Adam, 78, 90
 Second Coming, 112-14

 Self-awareness of Jesus, 34-7, 66
 Sin, 26-8, 32, 43, 69, 78, 84
 Sinlessness of Jesus, 32, 55, 60, 69,
 73, 108
 Smith, C. Ryder, 40, 69
 Son of Man, 57, 114
 Sympathy of Exalted Christ, 107-8
 Synoptic Gospels, 56, 58

 TAGORE, RABINDRANATH, 46
 Taylor, Vincent, 16, 30, 43, 58
 Temple, William, 87, 114
 Testimony to Jesus' divinity, 39-48
 Thomas à Kempis, 44
 Thomas Aquinas, 68, 75
 Toynbee, Arnold, 22
 Trinity, 30

 UNITARIANISM, 28-9
 United Nations Charter, 47

 VICARIOUS SACRIFICE, 88
 Virgin Birth, 62-6

 WATSON, PHILIP, 44, 90
 Watts, Isaac, 107
 Wells, H. G., 50
 Wesley, Charles, 44, 54, 70, 91
 Whale, J. S., 66
 Whittier, J. G., 44